A Companion to Birgitta of Sweden

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A Companion to Birgitta of Sweden

and Her Legacy in the Later Middle Ages

Edited by

Maria H. Oen



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Cover illustration: Woodcut from Anton Koberger's print of Birgitta's *Revelations* (Nuremberg, 1500), serving as frontispiece to *Liber celstis imperatoris ad reges* (Book VIII). Courtesy of Uppsala University Library.

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Abbreviations

AASS	*Acta sanctorum*, eds. Johannes Bollandus, Godefridus Henschenius, et al., 68 vols (Antwerp: 1643–1940)
AP	*Acta et processus canonizacionis b. Birgitte*, ed. Isak Collijn. SFSS, Ser. 2, Latinska skrifter 1 (Uppsala: 1924–31)
CCCM	*Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: 1967–)
CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina* (Turnhout: 1954–)
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna: 1866–)
ES	Alfonso of Jaén, *Epistola solitarii ad reges*, ed. Arne Jönsson, in Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones Book VIII*, ed. Hans Aili (Stockholm: 2002), 47–81
Extrav.	Birgitta of Sweden, *Reuelaciones Extrauagantes*, ed. Lennart Hollmann. SFSS, Ser. 2, Latinska skrifter 5 (Uppsala: 1956)
KVHAA	Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien. The Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities
MHUU	*Mittelalterliche Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Uppsala. Katalog über die C-Sammlung*, eds. Margarete Andersson-Schmitt, Håkan Hallberg, and Monica Hedlund, 8 vols. Acta Bibliothecae Universitatis Upsaliensis 26: 1–8 (Uppsala: 1988–95)
PL	*Patrologia latina cursus completus. Series latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne. 221 vols (Paris: 1841–64)
Prol. M.	*Prologus Magistri Mathie*, in Birgitta of Sweden, *Reuelaciones Book I*, ed. Carl-Gustaf Undhagen (Stockholm: 1977), 229–40
Rev. I–VIII	Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones Books I–VIII*, eds. Hans Aili, Birger Bergh, Ann-Mari Jönsson, and Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, 8 vols (Stockholm: 1967–2002)
RS	Birgitta of Sweden, *Opera minora I: Regvla Salvatoris*, ed. Sten Eklund (Stockholm: 1975)
SA	Birgitta of Sweden, *Opera minora 2: Sermo angelicus*, ed. Sten Eklund (Uppsala: 1972)
SBL	*Svenskt biografiskt lexikon* (Stockholm: 1917–)
SFSS	Samlingar utgivna av Svenska fornskriftsällskapet. Swedish Medieval Texts Society
UUB	Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek. Uppsala University Library

Notes on Editions and Translations

All references to Birgitta of Sweden's *Revelations* are to the critical edition (Rev. I–VIII; ES; Extrav.; RS; SA) published by Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien (KVHAA) together with Samlingar utgivna av Svenska fornskriftsällskapet (SFSS). English translations have been taken from *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Denis Searby, with Introductions and Notes by Bridget Morris, 4 vols (Oxford: 2006–15), unless otherwise indicated. The English translations of the individual books in the corpus correspond to the Oxford translation.

Information on diplomatic sources from *Diplomatarium suecanum* can be obtained online from the website of the Swedish National Archives. All references throughout the book contain an SDHK number that can be used to search the database on the website: https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sdhk. The complete critical edition of the *Revelations* is available as downloadable pdf files on: https://riksarkivet.se/digital-resources.

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Medieval Art: Iconography, Iconology, and Interpreting the Visual Imagery of the Middle Ages, edited by Lena Liepe (Berlin: 2019).

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Timeline

1302/03	Birgitta Birgersdotter is born into an aristocratic family in the region of Uppland in Sweden.
1305–14	Pope Clement V moves to Avignon, where the papacy will remain until 1377.
c. 1314	Birgitta's mother dies. Birgitta, together with her sister, moves to her maternal aunt's home in Östergötland.
c. 1316	Birgitta is married to Ulf Gudmarsson, who is from a noble family in Östergötland.
c. 1319–40	Birgitta gives birth to eight children (Märta [d. *c.* 1350], Karl [d. 1372], Birger [d. 1391], Katarina [d. 1381], Bengt [died in infancy], Gudmar [died in infancy], Ingeborg [d. *c.* 1350], and Cecilia [d. 1399]).
c. 1335–40s	Birgitta stays at the court of King Magnus Eriksson and Queen Blanche of Namur in Sweden.
1337	The Hundred Years' War breaks out between England and France.
1341–42	Birgitta and Ulf go on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.
1344 or 1346	Ulf dies in Sweden and is buried at the Alvastra Cistercian monastery in Östergötland. Shortly thereafter, according to her *Vita*, Birgitta experiences her "calling vision" at Alvastra.
1344/46–49	Birgitta presents herself publicly as a visionary representing God and enters the political scene. She becomes an outspoken critic of the Avignon papacy. Birgitta also becomes engaged in national politics in Sweden. She is supported by Master Mathias Övidsson (Ovidi), canon of Linköping; Peter Olofsson (Olavi), subprior, and later prior, of the Alvastra monastery; Master Peter Olofsson (Olavi) of Skänninge; and Bishop Hemming of Åbo.
1348	The Black Death devastates Europe.
1348–49	Prior Peter and Bishop Hemming travel to Avignon to represent Birgitta. The plague comes to Bergen, Norway, in 1349, and it spreads to Sweden in 1350.
1349	Birgitta moves to Rome. She travels via Milan together with Master Peter, among others. Prior Peter joins her later in Rome.

1350	Jubilee Year. Birgitta's daughter Katarina arrives in Rome and settles with her mother.
c. 1365–67	Birgitta and her entourage reside in Naples. She becomes acquainted with Queen Johanna I (Giovanna d'Angiò).
c. 1368	Alfonso Pecha, former bishop of Jaén, joins Birgitta's group. Pope Urban V arrives in Rome, where he meets Emperor Charles IV.
1370	Birgitta and Alfonso travel to Montefiascone, where they meet with Urban V. Birgitta seeks the papal approval of a new monastic order with a new rule. On 5 August she receives permission to establish a monastery at Vadstena, which is to follow the Augustinian rule with Birgitta's new rule added as constitutions. Urban V returns to Avignon, where he dies 19 December.
1371–72	Birgitta and her entourage set out for the Holy Land via Naples, where her son Karl dies. The group returns to Rome. On their way back they are received at the courts of Cyprus and Naples.
1373	On 23 July, Birgitta dies in her home close to Campo de' Fiori in Rome. She is buried in the Church of the Poor Clares, San Lorenzo in Panisperna. The two Swedish Peters compose Birgitta's first *vita.*
1374	Birgitta's relics are translated and enshrined in Vadstena. Miracle accounts are collected and presented to the archbishop of Uppsala, Birger Gregersson.
1375–77	Alfonso of Jaén compiles and edits the literary corpus that will be known as Birgitta's *Liber celestis revelacionum* ("The Heavenly Book of Revelations").
1377	Petitions are sent for Birgitta's canonization, together with Alfonso's edition of the *Revelations*. Papal investigators travel to Sweden. Pope Gregory XI returns to Rome.
1378	Urban VI is elected pope on 8 April, following Gregory XI's death. On 20 September, Pope Clement VII is elected in opposition to Urban VI, which causes the Great Schism.
1378–79	A new petition for Birgitta's canonization is sent to Pope Urban VI together with Alfonso's edition of the *Revelations*. The formal canonization process begins. Birgitta's *Revelations* spread rapidly through Europe.
1384	The first members of Vadstena monastery make their professions.

1391	Birgitta is canonized by Boniface IX (Roman Obedience) on 8 October.
1394	The second house of Birgitta's order is established outside of Florence, Santa Maria del Paradiso. The order spreads quickly, and by *c.* 1500 it numbers approximately 25 houses all over Europe.
1414–18	The Council of Constance takes place. The election of Pope Martin V (1417–31) puts an end to the Great Schism. The Birgittines seek to obtain a confirmation of Birgitta's canonization bull from 1391. The chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean Gerson, questions the authority of Birgitta's revelations.
1419	Birgitta's canonization is confirmed by Pope Martin V.
1431–49	The Council of Basel(-Ferrara-Florence) takes place. The orthodoxy of the *Revelations* is questioned during the council. The judgement passed in 1436 forbids the equation of the authority of Birgitta's *Revelations* with that of Scripture.
1595	The Birgittine house in Vadstena is dissolved, 68 years after the Protestant Reformation was first introduced in Sweden.

INTRODUCTION

Birgitta Birgersdotter and the *Liber celestis revelacionum*

Maria H. Oen

On 7 October 1391, Pope Boniface IX pronounced the sanctity of Birgitta Birgersdotter—a Swedish widow who, 42 years earlier, had left her native country in order to settle in Rome, where she presented herself as a prophet. The widow's primary claim to sanctity was constituted by the substantial literary corpus known as the *Liber celestis revelacionum* ("The Heavenly Book of Revelations," hereafter the *Revelations*), which had been compiled by her confessors after Birgitta's death, in 1373, to serve as evidence in support of a canonization. The *Revelations*, which spread swiftly in their original Latin and soon in numerous vernacular translations, purported to contain divine messages received by Birgitta directly from God, Christ, the Virgin, and several saints for the benefit of the Church and the salvation of humankind. Their content touches on most of the principal political conflicts and ecclesiastical debates of the time: the Avignon papacy, the Hundred Years' War, the legitimacy of secular and ecclesiastical rulers, the state of the priesthood, apostolic life, the immaculate conception of the Virgin, the authenticity of relics, the Eucharist, and numerous other subjects. Within a few decades the *Revelations*, whose status and validity were continuously debated at church councils after the proclamation of Birgitta's sainthood, were read in lay and ecclesiastical contexts all over Europe, including monasteries, universities, humanist circles, and various reform groups. How was it that a laywoman from the northern fringes of the world came to exercise such a great influence in so many different milieus in the later Middle Ages? The present volume seeks to answer this question by way of a study of Birgitta's life and legacy. The following ten chapters will explore St Birgitta of Sweden, the *Revelations*, and the monastic order she founded, while also offering an introduction to the scholarship of the field.

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1 Life and Legacy

Birgitta Birgersdotter was born into a land-owning family in the eastern part of the Kingdom of Sweden in the winter of 1302/03.[1] She was one of seven children of Birger Petersson (d. 1327), a knight and councilor of state who had participated in the codification of the provincial law (*Upplandslagen*), and Ingeborg Bengtsdotter, a distant descendant of the royal Folkung dynasty.[2] The families of Birgitta's parents were among the most prominent in the region of Uppland. Several relatives on Birger's side were bishops and canons, and others held significant offices, such as archbishop of Uppsala and provost of the cathedral. Members of her mother's family were, like Birger, codifiers and interpreters of law. Birgitta's family was pious. Preserved diplomas reveal several donations and bequests to religious houses and to the cathedral, and her father had undertaken a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in the early 1320s, when he also visited the papal city of Avignon.[3] Because of her mother's early death, in 1314, Birgitta and her only surviving sister spent the following years living with their maternal aunt Katarina Bengtsdotter, in the region of Östergötland, until they were both married in 1316. The thirteen-year-old Birgitta was betrothed to Ulf Gudmarsson, who appears in diplomatic sources as a landowner and member of the council of state in the area of Närke.[4] She bore him eight children, three of whom, Katarina (d. 1381), Birger (d. 1391), and Karl (d. 1372), appear frequently in the canonization documents and in the *Revelations*—our most comprehensive sources on Birgitta—as they spent longer periods of time with their mother after her conversion to a spiritual life and subsequent move to Italy.[5] Katarina went to Rome in 1350 and remained in her mother's company for the rest of her life, and, together with Birger, she played a key role in the

1 For thorough studies of Birgitta's life and parentage based on diplomatic sources, see Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och hennes värld* (Stockholm: 1971); Birgit Klockars, *Birgittas svenska värld* (Stockholm: 1976). An introduction in English based on Klockars and the same archival material is available in Bridget Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden* (Woodbridge: 1999). See also Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: 2001).

2 For Birgitta's father and his relatives, see SBL, vol. 4: 436.

3 SBL, vol. 4: 436. See also Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 32–33. Birgitta's *Vita* states that there was a tradition in her father's family of going on a Jerusalem pilgrimage, though according to the author of the SBL article there is no evidence suggesting that Birger did this.

4 Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 41.

5 For Birgitta's children, see Klockars, *Birgittas svenska värld*, 93–100; Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 46–52. See also SBL, vol. 21: 3, for Katarina, and vol. 4: 439, for Birger. Katarina was also venerated for her sanctity after her death. A canonization process was initiated, but it was not successful; see *Summarium processus canonizacionis B. Katherine de Vadstena. Rom 1480*, ed. Isak Collijn (Uppsala: 1933).

promotion of Birgitta's cult and monastic order. Karl also traveled to Rome, dying in Naples when he was about to embark on a pilgrimage with his mother and siblings to the Holy Land. During her married life Birgitta was appointed *magistra* to Blanche of Namur, who had been the consort of King Magnus Eriksson since 1335.[6] Despite this important position at court, Birgitta gradually distanced herself from the royal couple after her husband's death. The *Revelations* include advice to Magnus and Blanche, but also outright attacks on both of them.[7]

In 1341, Birgitta and Ulf went on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. According to Birgitta's *Vita*, Ulf fell ill as they passed through Arras on their way back to Sweden.[8] During this time Birgitta received a vision in which St Denis appeared and reassured her that her husband would recuperate and that this would be a sign to her that she was chosen by God to perform his will. When Ulf recovered and the pilgrims returned to Sweden, husband and wife made a vow of chastity and decided to convert to the monastic life, but Ulf died before his intention was fulfilled. Two slightly different extant versions of Birgitta's *Vita* give two different years for this event, 1344 and 1346. Although there has been much debate regarding which date is correct, most scholars accept 1344, which is recorded on Ulf's tombstone, now in the History Museum of Stockholm.[9] One reason for the particular interest in the year of Birgitta's husband's death is that it also marks the year of her conversion to a spiritual life and the beginning of her career as a prophet. This event, described in the hagiography,

6 AP, 528.

7 See, for example, Rev. VIII: 10–13; Olle Ferm, "Heliga Birgittas program för uppror mot Magnus Eriksson. En studie i politisk argumentationskonst," in *Heliga Birgitta—budskapet och förebilden. Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vadstena 3–7 oktober 1991*, eds. Alf Härdelin and Mereth Lindgren (Stockholm: 1993); Olle Ferm, "La legittimazione della rivolta di Brigida contro il re Magnus Eriksson," in *Santa Brigida, Napoli, L'Italia. Atti del convegno di studi italo-svedese, Santa Maria Capua Vetere, 10–11 maggio 2006*, eds. Olle Ferm, Alessandra Perriccioli Saggese, and Marcello Rotili (Naples: 2009).

8 AP, 80.

9 For a summary of the debate, see Marguerite Tjader Harris (ed.), *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations* (New York: 1990), 240, n. 32. A shorter version of the *Vita*, found in Uppsala, Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, C 15, gives the year 1346. This dating fits better with some of the witness statements from the canonization process than the date of 1344, which is given in the so-called process vita included in the acts. For the various views in the debate, see Sara Ekwall, *Vår äldsta Birgittavita och dennas viktigaste varianter* (Stockholm: 1965); "Årscykeln i Acta et Processus canonizacionis b. Brigide," *Personhistorisk tidskrift* 69 (1973): 1–9; Jan Liedgren, "Två birgittinska data," *Personhistorisk tidskrift* 70 (1974): 51–54; Sara Ekwall, "Den Heliga Birgittas makes dödsår än en gång," *Personhistorisk tidskrift* 72 (1976): 32–35; Arne Jönsson, "Birgitta i Birgittalegenderna," in Härdelin and Lindgren, *Heliga Birgitta*, 36. All references to Birgitta's *Vita* in the present Introduction are to the "process vita."

happens only "after some days" (*post aliquos dies*), when she was contemplating her new status as a widow.[10] The *Vita* explains that Birgitta had heard a voice calling her from a bright cloud three times while at prayer in her chapel. Upon the first two callings, she had immediately fled to confess herself, modestly fearing a diabolical illusion. The third time, however, Birgitta listened to the voice, which declared itself to be God's, and she was told not to fear. The voice then instructed her: "you shall be my bride, and my channel, and you shall hear and see spiritual things, and my Spirit shall remain with you even to your death."[11] This event marks a new chapter in Birgitta's life. Immediately following the so-called calling vision, the *Vita* states:

> Therefore, in the year of our Lord 1345, the first divine revelations were made to Lady Birgitta not in sleep but while she was awake and at prayer, with her body remaining alive in its vigor, but while she was caught up from her bodily senses in ecstasy and in visions, either spiritual or imaginary, with the coming of a vision or a supernatural and divine illumination of her intellect, for she saw and heard spiritual things and felt them in spirit.[12]

Furthermore, we read that Birgitta was instructed by God to stay in the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra in the diocese of Linköping, where Ulf was buried, and to have as her confessor Master Mathias (Övidsson/Ovidi, d. *c.* 1350), canon of Linköping Cathedral, who is probably the best-known Swedish theologian of the Middle Ages.[13] His works include a comment on the Revelation of St John (*Exposicio super Apocalypsim*), which was read by the Tuscan popular preacher Bernardino of Siena (d. 1444) and the theologian Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464), among others.[14] There are several studies devoted to the relationship between Birgitta and Mathias, and the possible influences of the one upon

10 AP, 80.

11 AP, 80–81: "…tu eris sponsa mea et canale meum et audies et videbis spiritualia, et spiritus meus permanebit tecum usque mortem."

12 I quote from the "process vita"; see AP, 81: "Igitur anno Domini millesimo iij. xl.v [1345] facte sunt prime diuine reuelaciones domine Brigide non in sompno, sed vigilando in oracione corpore manente viuo in vigore suo, sed rapta a sensibus corporalibus in extasi et in visione spirituali seu ymaginaria, accedente visione seu supernaturali diuina illustracione intellectuali, nam vidit et audiuit spiritualia et ea spiritu senciebat."

13 See SBL, vol. 25: 248. From the presentation of Mathias in the *Vita*, he appears to have been Birgitta's confessor even prior to Ulf's death. The instruction to stay at Alvastra is found in AP, 82.

14 For Master Mathias, see SBL, vol. 25: 248. For his comment on Revelation, see Mathias of Linköping, *Exposicio super Apocalypsim*, ed. Ann-Marie Billing-Ottosson (Uppsala: 2003).

the other.[15] The two shared an interest in revelations and prophecy, and additionally Mathias, who was trained in scholastic theology, was a strong opponent of the dialectical methodological approach to Scripture, an attitude also expressed in Book V of the *Revelations*. In the *Vita* Mathias is introduced by God as one who "has experience in discerning the two types of spirits" (*qui expertus est duorum spirituum secundum discrecionem*).[16] Indeed, it seems that he immediately took upon himself the task of defending the authenticity of Birgitta's revelations when she first presented herself publicly as a visionary in Sweden in the 1340s.[17] The apologia known from its *incipit* as *Stupor et mirabilia* (Jer. 5:30), composed by Mathias and later included as a prologue to the corpus of *Revelations*, dates from this period. The text is a burning defense of Birgitta's calling, and the miracle of her visions is claimed to surpass even that of the Incarnation.[18] It may also have been Mathias who organized the formal "testing" of Birgitta's spirits. In the *Revelations* there is a reference to the visionary having undergone diligent examination by bishops and learned religious and secular priests (*diligenti examinacione episcoporum ac magistrorum claustralium ac secularium clericorum*, Rev. IV: 78.2).[19] As to how this testing was performed, whether it was a doctrinal examination of the contents of a set of texts (what would later be compiled into the work *Revelations*) or an observation of visible bodily tokens of spiritual presence, as Nancy Caciola has determined to be a common method with which claims to spiritual possession were evaluated, the sources offer no information.[20] The conclusion, however, is recorded in the *Revelations*: Birgitta's visions had been "shown to have come from the holy and miraculous enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and from no other source" (*probata sunt ex pia et mirifica Spiritus sancti illustracione et non aliunde processisse*, Rev. IV: 78.2).

15 See, for instance, Emilia Zochowska, "Magister Mathias of Linköping and Saint Birgitta of Sweden: A Fellowship of Imagination," in *The Birgittine Experience: Papers from the Birgitta Conference in Stockholm 2011*, eds. Claes Gejrot, Mia Åkestam, and Roger Andersson (Stockholm: 2013). See also Chapter 2 by Anders Piltz in this volume.

16 AP, 81.

17 See the editor's introduction in Rev. I: 38–50.

18 Prol. M.: 21.

19 The testing is mentioned in another written apologia defending the authenticity of Birgitta's visions; see Alfonso of Jaén's ES: 3.9. More on this text below.

20 Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: 2003). On the discernment of spirits and Birgitta's case in particular, see also Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbridge: 1999); Wendy Love Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages* (Tübingen: 2011).

Birgitta soon gained the support of other clerics and religious men. Among these are two men who both went by the name Peter Olofsson (Petrus Olavi). One of them was the subprior of Alvastra monastery (where the *Vita* claims that Birgitta was staying after Ulf had died), hereafter called Prior Peter of Alvastra (d. 1390), and the other was a secular priest from Skänninge who is reported to have studied the liberal arts, thus earning him the title "Master Peter" (d. 1378).[21] In any case, whether they were struck by her charisma, saw Birgitta as a divine channel expressing spiritual and political ideas that they shared, or for some other reason, the two men left their posts in Sweden in order to follow her to Italy as her confessors. There, they continued to live with their spiritual daughter as part of her *familia* until Birgitta's death.[22] The two Peters authored Birgitta's first *Vita* in 1373, in which they explain that during their life together they had acted as the visionary's amanuenses, helping her to record the revelations in Latin.[23] In the second half of the 1340s, still in Sweden, Birgitta had also gained the support of Bishop Hemming of Åbo, who had studied in Paris and who, in the primary sources, emerges as being very well read.[24] Hemming acted as Birgitta's envoy, together with Prior Peter, when she sought to spread her messages in the early years of her prophetic career.

Regardless of how we approach the *Vita* as a source to the events in Birgitta's life after the death of Ulf, it is clear that she underwent dramatic changes upon entering the state of widowhood and that she became very engaged in spiritual and political matters, both locally and beyond. Sometime in the second half of the 1340s, Bishop Hemming and Prior Peter traveled to Avignon with a message from Birgitta to Pope Clement VI (according to Birgit Klockars, Hemming's former teacher in Paris), urging him to return to Rome before the Jubilee Year of 1350 and to negotiate peace between the kings of France and England. They also communicated her revelatory messages to the kings themselves.[25] In addition to these particular matters, Birgitta's prophetic activity in this period included the support of a crusade that her king, Magnus Eriksson, had launched

21 For Prior Peter and Master Peter, see SBL, vol. 29: 224 and 221, respectively. The former Peter became prior of Alvastra before leaving the monastery for Rome.

22 Master Peter joined Birgitta when she departed in 1349, followed later by Prior Peter, who then left his Cistercian monastery.

23 The principal source of the information on the production of the text of the *Revelations* is the *Vita*, see AP, 84–85.

24 On Hemming and his background, see Birgit Klockars, *Biskop Hemming av Åbo* (Helsinki: 1960), and Klockars' article in SBL, vol. 18: 627.

25 Rev. VI: 63 and Rev. IV: 103–105. Although she urges the pope to be impartial, it seems that Birgitta favors the English side. The *Vita* indicates that Hemming met with the kings, but that they were "less willing to receive the words of God" ("minus beniuolos ad recipiendum verba Dei"); see AP, 82–83. See also Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 79–82.

against the eastern Baltic region, and harsh criticism of the Swedish nobility, her own social class.[26] It was also during this period that she began to develop plans for a new monastic order as a part of her program for spiritual reform, what would later be established as *Ordo sanctissimi Salvatoris* ("The Order of the Most Holy Savior"). Though it is hard to give a precise date for its composition, a rule for this new order, *Regula Salvatoris*, forms a part of the *Revelations* corpus.[27] As Birgitta Fritz discusses in her chapter in the present volume, the first abbey of the order, often referred to as the "Birgittine Order," was founded on the grounds and in the old buildings of a royal palace in Vadstena, Sweden, which is mentioned in the 1346 testament of Magnus Eriksson and Blanche of Namur. Here, the royal couple express their desire to have the castle and its grounds bequeathed to a monastery.[28] The testament does not, however, refer to Birgitta or her order.

In addition to engaging herself in matters concerning spiritual, ecclesiastical, and political reform from this period, the *Vita* also reports that Birgitta distributed her worldly goods among her children and the poor, and that she manifested her spiritual conversion by altering her attire, something for which she was scorned by the nobility.[29] Despite such references to opposition, it is clear that Birgitta found distinguished supporters in ecclesiastical and monastic circles in Sweden, such as the two Peters, Bishop Hemming of Åbo, and Master Mathias of Linköping, and, furthermore, that she was "approved of" as a genuine holy woman by the local church after having been tested.

In 1349 Birgitta set out for Rome, never in her lifetime to return to the North. What her reasons for traveling were, or whether she had planned to come back to Sweden after a Roman pilgrimage, we cannot know. Surely the upcoming

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26 Birgitta appears to support the crusade but is also critical of King Magnus's strategies; see Rev. I: 57; Rev. IV: 2, 120; Rev. VIII: 39, 40, 43. See also Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 83–86; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Saint Birgitta's and Saint Catherine of Siena's Visions of Crusading," in *Sanctity and Female Authorship in the 14th Century and Beyond: Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena,* eds. Maria H. Oen and Unn Falkeid (New York: [forthcoming]). On Birgitta's Swedish prophetic career, see Päivi Salmesvuori, *Power and Sainthood: The Case of Birgitta of Sweden* (New York: 2014).

27 See RS. For an introduction to its textual history and to the rule, see the editor's introduction in RS and Bridget Morris's introduction in Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Denis Searby, with Introductions and Notes by Bridget Morris, 4 vols (Oxford: 2006–15), vol. 4: 109–22. See also Chapter 5 by Birgitta Fritz in the present book.

28 See SDHK 5307 in the database of the National Archives in Sweden (https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sdhk).

29 See AP, 88. See also Bridget Morris, "Birgittines and Beguines in Medieval Sweden," in *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liège and their Impact*, eds. Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson, and Jocely Wogan-Browne (Turnhout: 1999).

Jubilee Year would have been a motivation for her journey. Another reason suggested by scholars was that Birgitta went to Rome to seek approval for her monastic order. The *Vita*, however, ties Birgitta's departure to her engagement in papal politics: she is instructed in a revelation to go to Rome, where, owing to papal indulgences, there is "a shorter way" (*brevior via*) to heaven, and God says to her: "you shall stay there in Rome until you see the supreme pontiff and the emperor there at the same time in Rome, and you shall announce to them my words."[30] Birgitta's activities after her arrival in *Caput mundi*, if we consider the contents of the *Revelations*, were well in line with God's instructions: she continued to write to the pope in Avignon, urging him to return to Rome, but she also corresponded with other secular rulers and frequently expressed her opinions on the political developments in her native Sweden.

In the following years Birgitta undertook numerous pilgrimages in Italy. Destinations included the shrine of St Michael at Monte Gargano (Rev. IV: 131); Bari and the shrine of St Nicholas (Rev. VI: 103); Assisi (Rev. VII: 3); and the shrine of St Thomas in Ortona (Rev. VII: 4). In her final years she traveled with her whole entourage to the Holy Land.[31] Birgitta also spent much time in Naples, where she became close to Queen Johanna I, who also figures in Birgitta's revelations.[32] The queen was not the only prominent person with whom the Swedish noblewoman socialized in Italy. In fact, it seems that she quickly came to associate with the most distinguished families wherever she went on the peninsula.

30 AP, 94: "Stabis autem ibi in Roma, donec summum pontificem et imperatorem videbis ibidem insimul in Roma et eis verba mea nunciabis." On Birgitta's opposition to the Avignon papacy, see Unn Falkeid, *The Avignon Papacy Contested: An Intellectual History from Dante to Catherine of Siena* (Cambridge, Mass.: 2017), 121–45.

31 On Birgitta's pilgrimages, see Jane Tylus, "'Su dunque, peregrino!': Pilgrimage and Female Spirituality in the Writings of Birgitta and Catherine," in Oen and Falkeid, *Sanctity and Female Authorship*. On the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, see Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 118–42; Arne Jönsson, "Birgitta pilgrimsfärd till det heliga landet," in *Birgitta av Vadstena. Pilgrim och profet 1303–1373*, eds. Per Beskow and Annette Landen (Stockholm: 2003); Maria H. Oen, "'Apparuit ei Christus in eodem loco': Physical Presence and Divine Truth in Birgitta of Sweden's Revelations from the Holy Land," in *Faith and Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavia*, eds. Karoline Kjesrud and Mikael Males (Turnhout: [forthcoming]); Maria H. Oen, "The Locus of Truth: St Birgitta of Sweden and the Pilgrimage to the Holy Land," in *The Holy City: Tracing the Jerusalem Code, Vol. 1 Christian Cultures in Medieval Scandinavia* (*ca 1100–1536*), eds. Kristin B. Aavitsland and Linde Bonde (Berlin: forthcoming March 2020).

32 On Birgitta's time in Naples and the relationship with the queen, see Elizabeth Casteen, *From She-Wolf to Martyr: The Reign and Disputed Reputation of Johanna I of Naples* (Ithaca, N.Y.: 2015), especially Ch. 4; Bridget Morris, "Birgitta of Sweden and Giovanna of Naples: An Unlikely Friendship?" and Claudia Vultaggio, "I sodalizi Napolitani di Santa Brigida di Svezia," both in Ferm, Perriccioli Saggese, and Rotili, *Santa Brigida, Napoli, L'Italia*.

On her way to Rome in 1349, the *Revelations* indicate that Birgitta was received by the Visconti family, the rulers of Milan.[33] In Rome she was in contact with members of the powerful Colonna and Orsini families, and in Naples she became friendly with Lapa Buondelmonte, of the prominent Florentine Acciaiuoli family (Lapa's brother Niccolò was chief advisor to Queen Johanna).[34] When they first arrived in Rome, Birgitta and her group lived in the house of Cardinal Hugues Roger de Beaufort, brother of Pope Clement VI, where the Palazzo della Cancelleria currently stands. She was then given a house near Campo de' Fiori by a Roman noblewoman, Francesca Papazzuri, who later donated this building, today's Birgittine house on Piazza Farnese, to the abbey in Vadstena. After Birgitta's death the house functioned as a guest house for brothers traveling from Vadstena and for pilgrims coming from Sweden.[35]

In 1368 Birgitta came into contact with Alfonso Pecha (also referred to as Alfonso de Vadaterra, d. 1389), former bishop of Jaén in Andalusia.[36] Alfonso

33 See Rev. III: 3–9; Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 94.

34 For Birgitta's connections in Rome, see Isak Collijn, *Birgittinska gestalter. Forskningar i italienska arkiv och bibliotek* (Uppsala: 1929). Niccolò Orsini, count of Nola and Spoleto, is a witness in the canonization trial; see AP, 225–36. Birgitta is reported to have healed the son of Lapa; see AP, 331.

35 AP, 436–47; Collijn, *Birgittinska gestalter*, 13–17. In the course of the following centuries after Birgitta's death, Vadstena Abbey and the Birgittine Order struggled to maintain control over the property in Rome. On the history of the so-called Birgitta house (Casa di Santa Brigida), which, since the early 20th century, has again been occupied by members of the Birgittine Order, see Emil Hildebrand, "Den svenska kolonien i Rom under medeltiden," *Historisk Tidskrift* (1882): 1–50. While Hildebrand's article remains the most extensive history of the Birgitta house in Rome, Sara Risberg has, more recently, published several studies of archival sources related to the house and its inhabitants, see "Peder Månsson och striden om Birgittahuset," in *Fragment ur arkiven. Festskrift till Jan Brunius*, eds. Marie Lennersand, Åsa Karlsson, and Henrik Klackenberg (Västerås: 2013); "*Bona hospitalis sancte Birgitte anno Domini Mcdlxv.* En inventarieförteckning från Birgittahuset i Rom år 1465," in *Latinet i tiden. En festskrift till Hans Aili*, eds. Elin Andersson, Erika Kihlman, and Maria Plaza (Stockholm: 2014); "Petrus Ingemari and his Advocacy of Katarina of Vadstena," in *Continuity and Change*: *Papers from the Birgitta Conference at Dartington 2015*, eds. Elin Andersson, Claes Gejrot, E.A. Jones, and Mia Åkestam (Stockholm: 2017), especially 205–6, and n. 9, pp. 204–5; and "*Statuta hospitalis sancte Birgitte*. Stadgar för den heliga Birgittas gästhus," in *Humanitas. Festskrift till Arne Jönsson*, eds. Astrid M.H. Nilsson, Aske Damtoft Poulsen, and Johanna Svensson (Gothenburg: 2017).

36 On Alfonso and his relationship to Birgitta, see Michael Seidlmayer, "Ein Gehilfe der hl. Birgitta von Schweden: Alfons von Jaen," *Historisches Jahrbuch im Auftrage der Görres-Gesellschaft* 50 (1930): 1–18; Eric Colledge, "*Epistola solitarii ad reges:* Alphonse of Pecha as Organizer of Birgittine and Urbanist Propaganda," *Mediaeval Studies* 18 (1956): 19–49; Arne Jönsson (ed.), *Alfonso of Jaén: His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi* (Lund: 1989); Hans Torben Gilkær, *The Political Ideas of St. Birgitta and Her Spanish Confessor, Alfonso Pecha. Liber celestis*

had left his bishopric to become a hermit, the exact reasons for which are uncertain. After having arrived in Italy, he was working for the approval of an order devoted to St Jerome, the so-called Hieronymite Order, which he founded together with his brother Pedro Fernandez Pecha. Alfonso was also tirelessly promoting Rome as the true seat of the papacy. After his Swedish visionary companion in this political struggle died, he sought to recruit the Sienese holy woman Caterina Benincasa (St Catherine of Siena) to continue Birgitta's role as a divine channel laboring for the Roman cause.[37] Alfonso also appears as a significant figure in the Observant Reform Movement in Italy in the 1370s.[38] In other words, the Swedish visionary and the Spanish hermit had much in common in terms of politics, reform, and the founding of new orders, and upon their meeting he quickly became a part of Birgitta's group as her third confessor. In 1370, Alfonso and Birgitta traveled to Montefiascone together to meet with Urban V, whose death Birgitta predicted should he return to Avignon—which he did, and, in fact, he died shortly thereafter (Rev. IV: 138). Alfonso joined Birgitta and her companions on their journey to the Holy Land in 1372.

The *Revelations* and the *Vita* present Alfonso of Jaén as Birgitta's divinely appointed redactor. In the latter text it is stated that the Virgin told Birgitta, while she was in Montefiascone, to have Alfonso "write down and copy all the books of the revelations that had been divinely given to her and which indeed until then had been kept secret" (*scriberet et copiaret libros reuelacionum, que sibi date fuerant, que quidem reuelaciones vsque tunc secrete tenebantur*).[39] This instruction was again confirmed by Christ on Birgitta's deathbed, when she was commanded to "tell her confessors to hand over to the said hermit [Alfonso] all the secret revelations … in order that this same hermit might have them written out and that he might publish them to the nations for the honor and glory of God."[40] While her Swedish companions returned to the North with Birgitta's relics in order to work for the monastery in Vadstena, Alfonso became the chief figure in the promotion of Birgitta's cult and the campaign for her

imperatoris ad reges: A Mirror of Princes, trans. Michael Cain (Odense: 1993); Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*; Arne Jönsson, "Ex-Bishop Alfonso of Jaén, St. Bridget's Evangelist," in Ferm, Perriccioli Saggese, and Rotili *Santa Brigida, Napoli, L'Italia*.

37 This is clear from a letter written by Catherine; see Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, ed. and trans. Suzanne Noffke (Tempe, Ariz.: 2000–08), vol. 1: 38–41 (Letter T127, dated to "near" 26 March 1374).

38 See Camille Rouxpetel, "The Crossing Paths of Birgitta of Sweden, Catherine of Siena, and Alfonso of Jaén," in Oen and Falkeid, *Sanctity and Female Authorship*.

39 AP, 98.

40 Ibid.: "…quod ipsa diceret suis confessoribus, vt ipsi traderent dicto heremite omnes reuelaciones secretas … vt idem heremita eas scribi faceret et ad Dei honorem et gloriam gentibus publicaret." See also Rev. VII: 31 and Extrav.: 49.

canonization in Italy. His redaction of the *Revelations* was submitted to the first canonization committee in 1377, and extant letters indicate that it was he who ensured the rapid copying and wide distribution of the text in deluxe codices sent to prominent recipients, such as the queens of Castile, Cyprus, and Sicily.[41] The principal seat of the copying activity seems to have been a scriptorium in Naples connected to the House of Anjou, whose queen at the time, Johanna, sent petitions to the pope in favor of her late friend's canonization.[42] Emperor Charles IV and the king of Sweden, Albrecht of Mecklenburg, likewise sent such petitions.[43] Witness depositions were taken in Sweden and in Italy. Alfonso's own testimony is, in addition to those of Birgitta's daughter Katarina and Prior Peter, the most comprehensive in the documents from the canonization process. It has been suggested that Alfonso was also responsible for the final editing of the *Vita* composed by the two Peters.[44] Thus, the former bishop played a crucial role in relation to virtually all of the Birgittine primary sources: the *Revelations*, as a textual corpus with a distinct organization, is, to a large extent, the product of Alfonso, and the final version of the *Vita* was also probably checked by him. This is important to keep in mind when assessing and analysing these sources. However, it should also be kept in mind that Alfonso and Birgitta, and most likely the rest of her entourage, shared a political and spiritual agenda.

41 This is reported in a letter (dated to 1384–91) written by Magnus Petri, another member of Birgitta's *familia*, and published in Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, "Une source du prologue (Chap. 1) aux Révélations de Sainte Brigitte par le cardinal Jean de Turrecremata," *Eranos* 58 (1960): 214–26. There is also a letter from Alfonso of Jaén to the archbishop in Uppsala, dated 15 January 1378, that includes information about the copying and distribution of the manuscripts, see SDHK 11166 in the database of the National Archives in Sweden (https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sdhk). On the canonization process, see AP and Tore Nyberg, "The Canonization Process of St. Birgitta of Sweden," in *Procès de canonisation au Moyen Âge—Medieval Canonization Processes*, ed. Gábor Klaniczay (Rome: 2004).

42 On the early MSS, see Hans Aili and Jan Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae: The Earliest Illuminated Manuscripts and Panel Paintings Related to the Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, 2 vols (Stockholm: 2003); Hans Aili, "Handskrifterna till Birgittas revelationer," in Beskow and Landen, *Birgitta av Vadstena* (Stockholm: 2003); Hans Aili, "The Manuscripts of *Revelaciones S. Birgittae*," in Ferm, Perriccioli Saggese, and Rotili *Santa Brigida, Napoli, L'Italia*; Anette Creutzburg, *Die heilige Birgitta von Schweden. Bildliche Darstellungen und theologische Kontroversen im Vorfeld ihrer Kanonisation (1373–1391)* (Kiel: 2011). See also Chapter 7 in the present work.

43 Printed in Collijn's critical edition, AP.

44 According to Ekwall, the "C 15 vita," i.e. the shorter version, is the one authored by the two Peters, whereas the longer "process vita" was edited and augmented by Alfonso; see Ekwall, *Vår äldsta Birgittavita*.

Although Birgitta had plans for her own monastic order, she never took any vows herself, and neither did her daughter Katarina (though in modern literature she is often portrayed as the first abbess of Vadstena). Moreover, despite her strong association with the Cistercian Order, with which she was first connected after her conversion and through her lifelong contact with Prior Peter, Birgitta seems, like so many other holy women of the later Middle Ages, to have had contact with, and been spiritually inspired by, several orders, while never actually belonging formally to one.[45] In addition to her close association with the Cistercians, in Italy she was actively engaged with Franciscans, and especially the Poor Clares in Rome.[46] Before her conversion, Birgitta had sent one of her daughters, Cecilia, to the Dominican house of Skänninge, an order with which her confessor Master Peter was associated before he committed to following Birgitta.[47] As Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby establishes in her chapter in this volume, the Dominicans were among the first and most eager people to promote the cult of Birgitta in central Italy. The *Regula Salvatoris*, which deals with all possible aspects of monastic life, from prayer to practicalities, appears to reflect these multiple spiritual connections. And Bridget Morris points out in her introduction to the translation of the critical edition of the *Regula* (with the later additions of Prior Peter gathered in the *Revelaciones extravagantes*—more on this below) that while it was new in its concept, it also owed much to the Benedictine rule, especially in its Cistercian practice, and there are also influences from the Franciscans and Dominicans, as well as the Augustinian rule.[48] Birgitta's *Regula* did not receive approval until 1370, and even then only in a highly revised form, added as constitutions to the rule of St Augustine.[49] After her mother's death, Katarina continued to petition for the approval of Birgitta's original monastic plans. She succeeded in having another version,

45 As such she fits into a pattern identified by Caroline Walker Bynum in her exploration of the spiritual lives of late medieval laywomen; see "Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, eds. Jill Raitt, Bernard McGinn, and John Meyendorff (London: 1989).

46 For Birgitta's network in Italy and her contact with the Poor Clares in Rome, see Collijn, *Birgittinska gestalter*. For Franciscan influences, see Henrik Roelvink, "Andlig släktskap mellan Franciskus och Birgitta," in Härdelin and Lindgren, *Heliga Birgitta*.

47 Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 46–52.

48 See Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations*, vol. 4: 109–22, esp. 113–14.

49 Since the Council of Lyon, 1274, there had been a prohibition on the establishment of new orders. In 1370, Birgitta only received permission to establish two convents in Vadstena, not a new order.

more similar to that of Birgitta, approved, though still added as constitutions to the Augustinian rule, in a bull issued by Urban VI in 1378.[50]

Governed by an abbess and a general confessor, Birgitta's highly original "double order" was to have a certain number of priests, who were termed *fratres* (brethren) and who had a pastoral mission, as well as nuns living a contemplative life within strict enclosure. The two groups, who were to exist completely segregated, were not equal in number; there were to be far more nuns than brethren, and the purpose of the latter was to serve the former. The power over the monastery was to be in the hands of the abbess. When the order was established, however, there turned out to be a constant struggle between the two distinct parts of the monastery, and between the abbess and the general confessor.[51] The order also received much criticism from the outside for its inclusion of both men and women. Despite its many problems from the very beginning, Birgitta's order spread quickly all over Europe. Not long after the establishment of the motherhouse in Vadstena, another house was founded outside of Florence (Santa Maria del Paradiso, 1394), and houses were formed later in Danzig, in all of the Scandinavian countries, including modern-day Finland, and in England. Several houses were also added in German, Dutch, and Baltic areas.

2 The *Revelations*

The principal source we have for the production of the *Revelations* is Birgitta's *Vita*. Here the authors state that:

> …when she [Birgitta] was well, she wrote down with her own hand and in her mother tongue the words divinely given to her; and she had them most faithfully translated into the Latin tongue by us, her confessors. And afterward, she listened to the translation together with her own writing that she had written, so that there might be not one word more added

50 On the order, see Torvald Höjer, *Studier i Vadstena klosters och birgittinordens historia intill midten af 1400-talet* (Uppsala: 1905); Hans Cnattingius, *Studies in the Order of St. Bridget of Sweden* (Stockholm: 1963); Tore Nyberg, *Birgittinische Klostergründungen des Mittelalters* (Leiden: 1965); Tore Nyberg (ed.), *Birgitta. Hendes værk og hendes klostre i Norden* (Odense: 1991); Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 160–77; Ulla Sander-Olsen, Tore Nyberg, and Per Sloth Carlsen (eds.), *Birgitta Atlas: Saint Birgitta's Monasteries. Die Klöster der Heiligen Birgitta* (Uden: 2013). See also Chapter 5 by Birgitta Fritz in the present work.

51 More on this in Chapter 5.

there or missing but only what she herself had divinely heard and seen in the vision.[52]

Although this hagiographical description can hardly be taken as a truthful account of how the literary corpus came into being, it is very interesting to note that the confessors display an eagerness to portray Birgitta as someone who could herself write and that she understood Latin very well.[53] Furthermore, there are several references in both the *Revelations* and in the *Vita* to Birgitta learning Latin from Master Peter.[54] In relation to other visionary laywomen in the later Middle Ages—of whom, as research from the past three decades indicates, there were many—this image of Birgitta as a writerly agent who acquired skills through learning stands out.[55] Few of the laywomen who emerge in the sources as visionaries are represented as composers of texts of their own. Many certainly collaborated with clerics who recorded their visions, but in most cases the visions belong to the hagiographical accounts *about* the women.[56] In

52 AP, 84: "…illa verba diuinitus ei data scribebat in lingua sua materna manu sua propria, quando erat sana, et faciebat illa translatari in lingua latina fidelissime a nobis confessoribus suis et postea ascultabat illa cum scriptura sua, quam ipsa scripserat, ne vnum verbum ibi plus adderetur uel deficeret, nisi que ipsa in visione diuinitus audierat et viderat." Many witnesses also testify that she wrote down the visions herself; see AP, 270 (Magnus Petri); 328 (Katarina); 384 (Alfonso); 518 (Prior Peter).

53 Yet a number of scholars have taken this to be a truthful account of the production of the corpus, without questioning what type of source this is or inquiring further into the nature of the collaboration. An example is the editor of Book I, Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, in his General Introduction to the critical edition (Rev. I).

54 See article 48 of the *articuli interrogatorii*, AP, 24, and the testimony of Prior Peter in AP, 545–46. See also Rev. VI: 105.

55 A few among numerous examples are: Katharina M. Wilson (ed.), *Medieval Women Writers* (Manchester: 1984); Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff (ed.), *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (Oxford: 1986); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: 1987); Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350)* (New York: 1998); Catherine Mooney (ed.), *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* (Philadelphia: 1999); Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (eds.), *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100–c. 1500* (Turnhout: 2010).

56 I focus here on laywomen. Within the context of orders the situation is different; on these, see e.g. Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women Mystics in the Thirteenth Century: The Case of the Nuns of Helfta," in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: 1982); Mary Jeremy Finnegan, *The Women of Helfta: Scholars and Mystics* (Athens, Ga.: 1991); Barbara Newman (ed.), *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley: 1998); Barbara Newman, "The Visionary Texts and Visual Worlds of Religious Women," in *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries*, eds. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Susan Marti (New York: 2008); John van Engen, "Communal Life: The Sister-books," in Minnis and Voaden, *Medieval Holy Women*. On

contrast to what is written about Birgitta, many of the *vitae* pertaining to other holy laywomen of the period suggest that any knowledge concerning language and writing the women possessed was the result of divine gifts; they were not learned skills but were bestowed miraculously.[57] Furthermore, in these cases the women are often said to have been unable to discern or read what they said or wrote, and that the act of transmission usually occurred while they were in an ecstatic trance. Presenting the women as alienated from textuality, that being the domain of male learned culture, and from Latin, the principal language of that culture, could be seen as a strategy to bypass the Pauline injunction against the female public voice and women instructing, also codified in *Decretum Gratiani*.[58] By removing these women, whose visions typically contained spiritual teachings or instructions, from the instruments of publication, such as the pen, or the principal language of teaching, the visionaries appeared less as active agents of instruction, and more as passive vessels—which in turn could increase the likelihood of their teachings being widely circulated.[59] Against this background, it is striking that the confessors are so eager to show Birgitta's control over the text. *She* writes down the revelation in her own hand—a point that is also made by other witnesses from her group in the canonization documents—and she possesses the skills necessary to check that the result is indeed what she intended it to be. That Birgitta did not compose in Latin herself, despite apparent excellent knowledge of the language, can be seen as a variant of this strategy to avoid "too much" textual agency, while at the same time strengthening the role of Birgitta as God's chosen prophet. It is only she, and not the confessors, who has experienced the visions; hence, Birgitta must

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textual collaborations between visionary women and their male supporters, see John W. Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: 2006); John W. Coakley, "Women's Textual Authority and the Collaboration of Clerics," in Minnis and Voaden, *Medieval Holy Women* (Turnhout: 2010).

57 On this, see Christine F. Cooper-Rompato, *The Gift of Tongues: Women's Xenoglossia in the Later Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: 2010).

58 1 Cor. 14:34–35; 1 Tim. 2:12; Emil Friedberg (ed.), *Corpus Juris Canonici* (Leipzig: 1879–81, repr. Graz: 1955), vol. 1: col. 86. See also Alastair Minnis, "Religious Roles: Public and Private," in Minnis and Voaden, *Medieval Holy Women*.

59 On this topic, see Dyan Elliott, "*Dominae* or *Dominatae?* Female Mysticism and the Trauma of Textuality," in *Women, Marriage, and Family in Medieval Christendom: Essays in Memory of Michael M. Sheehan, C.S.B.*, eds. Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal (Kalamazoo: 1998); Jane Tylus, "Mystical Literacy: Writing and Religious Women in Late Medieval Italy," in *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, eds. Carolyn Muessig, George Ferzoco, and Beverly Mayne Kienzle (Leiden: 2012); F. Thomas Luongo, "Saintly Authorship in the Italian Renaissance: The Quattrocento Reception of Catherine of Siena's Letters," in *Catherine of Siena: The Creation of a Cult*, eds. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Gabriela Signori (Turnhout: 2013).

be able to evaluate if the final text correctly relates God's message.[60] In the case of the only other saintly laywoman whose name is associated with a textual corpus comparable to that of Birgitta's, namely Catherine of Siena, it remained a point of disagreement among her followers and hagiographers as to whether or not she could write, even though in one of her letters she claimed to do so.[61] In Birgitta's case, however, it seems that the portrayal of her as a writer is a part of a specific strategy to promote her as a prophet and evangelist, i.e. a biblical author.[62] This is also reflected in the early illuminations, where the visionary is rendered in accordance with the traditional iconography of the authors of the Gospels and Moses.[63] However, Birgitta was never presented as the author of the *Revelations*, or as an instructor. She is explicitly described as the channel (*canale*) of God, and the textual corpus is presented as *His* words revealed to Birgitta so that she can pronounce the divine message to the world. The work claims, in other words, to have the same status as Scripture—an affirmation that invited much opposition in the years that followed Birgitta's canonization, and which, in fact, resulted in a 1436 prohibition against its circulation as "heavenly."[64]

To understand why such a highly different strategy was taken in the promotion of Birgitta's sanctity it is useful to consider, firstly, that as a "holy woman" she was not presenting herself as a mystic seeking a spiritual union

60 This is arguably the motif of an illumination in one of the oldest preserved codices containing the revelations dating to the late 1370s. On this, see Chapter 7 in the present work. For different interpretations of Birgitta's role as a prophet and her authorial agency, see the chapters by F. Thomas Luongo and Anders Piltz in the present book. See also Luongo's "Inspiration and Imagination: Visionary Authorship in the Early Manuscripts of the *Revelations* of Birgitta of Sweden," *Speculum* 93, no. 4 (2018): 1102–50.

61 On the topic of Catherine's ability to write, see Jane Tylus, *Reclaiming Catherine of Siena: Literacy, Literature, and the Signs of Others* (Chicago: 2009); Jane Tylus, "Writing versus Voice: Tommaso Caffarini and the Production of a Literate Catherine," in Hamburger and Signori, *Catherine of Siena* (Turnhout: 2013); and Catherine Mooney, "Wondrous Words: Catherine of Siena's Miraculous Reading and Writing According to the Early Sources," in Hamburger and Signori, *Catherine of Siena*. For Catherine's letter, see Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, vol. 2: 494–506, at 505 (letter T272).

62 In the *Vita*, Birgitta is explicitly compared with the prophets and the evangelists; see AP, 86.

63 Anette Creutzburg, "Darstellungen von göttlicher Inspiration in der Neapeler Buchmalerei. Zur Visualisierung von *auctoritas* in der Autorenbildern der hl. Birgitta von Schweden," in *Buchschätze des Mittelalters. Forschungsrückblicke—Forschungsperspektiven. Beiträge zum Kolloquium des Kunsthistorisches Instituts der Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel vom 24. Bis zum 26. April 2009*, eds. Klaus Gereon Beuckers, Christoph Jobst, and Stefanie Westphal (Regensburg: 2011). More on this in Chapter 7 in the present book.

64 See Chapter 4 by Anna Fredriksson and Chapter 6 by Roger Andersson in the present book.

with God, nor was she practicing self-mortification for the salvation of others, like so many *mulieres religiosae* in this period. Instead, Birgitta presented herself as a prophet modeled on those of the Old Testament.[65] In this way, Birgitta, "Sibyl of the North," is more similar to a monastic visionary like the "Sibyl of the Rhine," Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179). Secondly, it should be remembered that Birgitta's canonization process was among the first of its kind in which the laywoman's principal claim to sanctity was the visions presented in a unified textual corpus. How such phenomena were to be defined was not entirely clear in this period.[66] Different contexts operated with different definitions. And when visions or revelations were used for the promotion of the political and spiritual agenda, as well as the authority, of a laywoman it was important to proceed with caution. The sometimes idiosyncratic strategies adopted in the promotion of Birgitta and her *Revelations* can be seen as the result of her supporters' attempts, based on trial and error, to develop a saintly image of Birgitta that struck a balance between authoritative on the one hand and humble and meek on the other. The outcome of the canonization process and subsequent perennial deliberations over the status of Birgitta's writings had a fundamental impact on how later female visionaries were evaluated.[67] Interestingly, it seems that it is also after this that the question of holy women's lack of ability, and even unwillingness, to write becomes (in their own words, and in those of their hagiographers) a hagiographical topos in itself.[68]

The *Vita*'s description of the textual recording of the revelations presents them as the answers for people who explicitly sought out celestial advice through Birgitta. Thus, upon request, Birgitta prays and receives a vision, which is related directly and orally, or expressed in writing and then sent to those who were making the enquiry.[69] The Peters go on to list some prominent enquirers whose status could lend further authority to Birgitta: "the lady queen and archbishop of Naples … the queen and king and the princes and many others from the kingdom of Cyprus and from the kingdom of Sicily; and by men, and

65 For a discussion of Birgitta in relation to mysticism, see André Vauchez, "Epilogue," in Oen and Falkeid, *Sanctity and Female Authorship*.

66 On this, see Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80, no. 1 (2005): 1–43.

67 Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'?" 33–43; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 274–319.

68 See Elliott, "*Dominae or Dominatae*?" This could also explain the differences in the strategies of Catherine of Siena's two principal hagiographers, Raymond of Capua and Tommaso da Siena (Caffarini). See Tylus, "Writing versus Voice."

69 AP, 84–85.

by women too, from Italy, from Sweden, and even from Spain."[70] Indeed, many chapters in the *Revelations* take the form of letters, while others describe how, as well as when and where, a certain individual came and asked Birgitta for advice or knowledge on a specific matter, which then prompted a divine answer revealed to her in a vision. Whether the chapters collected in the *Revelations* were written down prior to Alfonso's compilation of the corpus in the 1370s we cannot know. Some texts, which according to their prologues date from the Sweden years and which take the form of complete books, such as the so-called *Liber questionum* ("The Book of Questions"), Book V in Alfonso's edition, are likely to have been composed as written works already in the 1340s, though it has proven impossible to present conclusive evidence in favor of this dating.[71] With the exception of what has traditionally been regarded as Birgitta's autographs, in the form of short excerpts of texts written in Old Swedish and now gathered in the codex A 75 of the National Library in Stockholm (Kungliga Biblioteket), the oldest textual witnesses to the *Revelations* are three Neapolitan manuscripts dated to 1377–81, which contain the redaction of Alfonso.[72]

The first edition of the *Revelations* by Alfonso, which is the principal evidence we have to go on, was, according to the introduction in the first volume of the critical edition, completed by 1377. Its modern editor, Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, argues that this version included only Books I to VII of what is termed *Liber celestis* (the seventh book being frequently referred to as *ultimus liber* in the canonization documents), and that this was presented in several copies to the first canonization committee appointed by Pope Gregory XI to evaluate Birgitta's case.[73] The pontiff died in March of the following year, 1378, and another committee, receiving a new set of books, was soon appointed by his successor, Urban VI. Alfonso then began to expand on the corpus, adding what has been called Book VIII, a collection of which approximately half of its contents are repetitions from the foregoing books, organized according to their common subject, namely secular rule. This compilation also goes by the title

70 AP, 85: "…domina regina et archiepiscopus de Neapoli, regina quoque et rex ac principes multique alij de regno Cipri et de regno Secilie, et de Ytalia, de Swecia, eciam de Yspania, tam viri quam eciam mulieres."

71 Jönsson, for instance, suggests that Books I and V, and possibly also II, were already organized as such prior to Alfonso's editing; see Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén*, 55–58. See also the editors' introductions to the individual books, especially in Rev. I and Rev. V.

72 On Birgitta's autographs, see Bertil Högman, *Heliga Birgittas originaltexter* (Uppsala: 1951). The three manuscripts, which are thoroughly treated in Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*, are: Warszawa, Biblioteka Narodowa, 3310; Palermo, Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana, IV.G.2; and New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M.498. These MSS are also discussed in Chapter 7 in the present book.

73 See the editor's Introduction in Rev. I: 13–26.

Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges ("The Heavenly Emperor's Book to Kings"), and it was preceded by a prologue authored by Alfonso himself, termed *Epistola solitarii ad reges* ("The Hermit's Letter to Kings"). The *Epistola*, like Mathias of Linköping's *Stupor et mirabilia*, which was added as a prologue to the entire corpus, takes the form of an apologia arguing for the authenticity and divine origin of the visions.[74] Furthermore, Alfonso gathered those of Birgitta's revelations that concerned popes into *Tractatus de summis pontificibus* ("Treatise to the Highest Pontiffs"),[75] and he added a collection of readings in honor of the Virgin under the title *Sermo angelicus* ("The Angel's Sermon"), which was intended for the nuns of Birgitta's order. He possibly also added the prayer collection entitled *Quattuor oraciones* ("Four Prayers"). Undhagen dates this second extended redaction, meant for broad circulation and not the canonization committee specifically, to sometime before 16 September 1379, as Alfonso's deposition in the canonization trial, which was taken this day, refers to the *Epistola* and the *Liber celestis imperatoris*.[76] Later, the rule of the new order, *Regula Salvatoris*, was added to the corpus, as was a set of *addiciones et declaraciones* by Prior Peter. Some of these are included in the seven books of revelations, and some form their own collection, entitled *Revelaciones extravagantes* ("supplementary revelations" or "Extravagant Revelations" as the collection is dubbed in the modern English translation of the corpus). Many of these additions, which stem from Peter's time at Vadstena Abbey, concern the monastic order.[77]

In his introduction to the critical edition of the *Epistola*, Arne Jönsson offers several arguments in favor of an earlier dating of Alfonso's compilation. He suggests that the edition of the books of revelations was already prepared in 1374–75 and the *Liber celestis imperatoris* in 1375; and he posits that the *Epistola* was written no later than 1376.[78] Whichever dating of Alfonso's edition(s) is correct, a specific collection of texts was chosen by the inhabitants of Vadstena Abbey almost a century later, around 1490, when they commissioned the first printed version of the Birgittine corpus from Bartholomaeus Ghotan in Lübeck, ready in 1492. This print contains Books I–VIII of revelations, including Prior Peter's additions; Mathias's and Alfonso's prologues, *Regula Salvatoris*, *Sermo*

74 On this, see Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén*; Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*.

75 Edited by Arne Jönsson, in *St. Bridget's Revelations to the Popes. An Edition of the so-called Tractatus de summis pontificibus* (Lund: 1997).

76 On the two redactions, see Undhagen, Rev. I: 13–26. See also his description of other later redactions appearing in different contexts, 30–37.

77 For a thorough introduction to each book, see the Editor's Introduction in the individual volumes in the critical corpus, and those of Bridget Morris in the English translation.

78 Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén*, 108.

angelicus, *Quattuor oraciones*, and *Revelaciones extravagantes*; a defense of Birgitta's visions stemming from the Council of Basel(-Ferrara-Florence, 1431–49) by the Spanish cardinal Johannes de Turre Cremata (Juan de Torquemada), known as *Defensorium super Revelationes celestes Sancte Birgitte*; the canonization bull of Boniface IX from 1391; the confirmation of the canonization, a bull issued by Pope Martin V and dated to 1 July 1419 (Florence); an abbreviated version of Birgitta's *Vita*; and a set of prayers to Birgitta, *Oratio deuota ad sanctam Birgittam.* This selection of texts appears in eight further complete Latin editions printed in Nuremberg in 1500 and 1517; Rome in 1558, 1606, and 1628; Antwerp in 1611; Cologne in 1628; and Munich in 1680.

Starting in the late 1370s, the *Revelations* circulated all over Europe in codices. More than 150 Latin manuscripts have thus far been identified, and the text also appears in numerous vernacular translations, including German, English, Swedish, Norwegian, and Italian.[79] The corpus is preserved in manuscripts where the contents correspond more or less to Undhagen's description of Alfonso's first and second redactions, but excerpts of the text were also anthologized from the very beginning of its diffusion.[80] Individual revelations can be found, in Latin or in the vernaculars, in various *miscellanea*, such as devotional books (e.g. the Middle English *Speculum devotorum*)[81] and *zibaldoni* (Italian vernacular compilations of texts for well-read laymen). The latter were often compiled by the owner himself or herself and included excerpts of classical and contemporary literature ranging from Seneca to Boccaccio. Selections of Birgitta's *Revelations* appear in numerous 15th-century *zibaldoni* from Florence, sometimes side by side with writings concerning exemplary government, for instance, the dialogue between the famous Florentine statesman Guido del Palagio and his advisors.[82] There are also many manuscripts that contain larger extracts of the *Revelations* or the complete version of one of Alfonso's compilations, such as *Liber celestis imperatoris* preceded by the *Epistola,* or the *Tractatus de summis pontificibus*.[83]

79 On the vernacular translations, see Veronica O'Mara and Bridget Morris (eds.), *The Translation of the Works of St Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars* (Turnhout: 2000).

80 On the oldest MSS and the editions of Alfonso, see Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*.

81 James Hogg (ed.), *The Speculum devotorum of an Anonymous Carthusian of Sheen* (Analecta Cartusiana), 12–13 (Salzburg: 1973–74).

82 Examples of Florentine *zibaldoni* containing Birgittine texts include Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 1251; 1258; 1345; 1397; 1939. See also Dale Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance* (New Haven: 2000), Ch. 6, esp. 86–87.

83 An example containing ES and Rev. VIII is Oslo, Nasjonalbiblioteket, Ms.fol.1992, and regarding the *Tractatus*, see Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashb. 896.

The contents of the revelations are highly diverse. As indicated above, the corpus contains texts that encourage spiritual and ecclesiastical reform, with threats and advice to secular rulers and popes alike, but they also comprise meditations on scenes from the life of Christ that could have been taken directly from works such as the Franciscan *Meditaciones vite Christi*, or references to Birgitta's practical daily life.[84] Moreover, they are permeated with biblical passages, as medieval texts usually are.[85] The great variety in material can help explain the very different contexts in which the *Revelations* were read, collected, and anthologized.

3 Birgittine Scholarship

While Birgitta has been overlooked in most of the English-language anthologies on medieval women's spirituality as well as in collections of writings by medieval women that have appeared during the past three decades, the saint, her monastic order, and the *Revelations* have nevertheless been the subject of a vast amount of scholarship.[86] From the late 19th century onwards, Swedish historians and philologists began publishing archival sources related to Birgitta and her order.[87] In the 1950s, The Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities (Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien) in Sweden commissioned a critical edition of the *Revelations*, which was published between 1956 and 2002.[88] During this period numerous biographies have appeared, some of which are thoroughly based on primary sources, while others are less scholarly in their approach.[89] For a long time, Swedish

84 The most famous examples are Rev. VII: 15 and 21.

85 See, for example, Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna. En undersökning av den heliga Birgittas källor* (Stockholm: 1966). On Birgitta and the Bible, see Chapter 2 in the present volume.

86 A most welcome exception is Minnis and Voaden, *Medieval Holy Women*.

87 The most important publication is undoubtedly AP. Other pioneering publications are Höjer, *Studier i Vadstena klosters och birgittinordens historia*; Knut B. Westman, *Birgitta-studier 1* (Uppsala: 1911).

88 Edited by Hans Aili, Birger Bergh, Sten Eklund, Lennart Hollmann, Ann-Mari Jönsson, Arne Jönsson, and Carl-Gustaf Undhagen.

89 Birgit Klockars' biographies (*Birgittas svenska värld* and *Birgitta och hennes värld*) belong to the former, whereas Sven Stolpe's (*Birgitta i Sverige och i Rom*, 2 vols [Stockholm: 1973]) are perhaps illustrative examples of the latter. Other biographies worth mentioning are Johannes Jørgensen, *Den hellige Birgitta af Vadstena* (Copenhagen: 1941) and Birger Bergh, *Heliga Birgitta. Åttabarnsmor och profet* (Lund: 2002). On the image of Birgitta in Swedish biographies, see Carina Nynäs, *Jag ser klart? Synen på den heliga Birgitta i svenska 1900-talsbiografier* (Åbo: 2006).

remained the principal language in which Birgittine sources and research were published, thereby making the material less accessible to an international audience. Since the 1990s, however, several biographies and studies in English have appeared, which in turn have generated a greater interest in the saint and her order.[90] This interest has grown further with the arrival of an English translation, by Denis Searby, of the complete critical edition of the *Revelations* (Oxford University Press, 2006–15), equipped with introductions and notes as well as extremely useful indexes by Bridget Morris.[91] The critical edition and its translation have spurred a great upsurge in scholarly treatments of Birgitta and her legacy within several academic disciplines, including literary studies, art history, history, theology, philology, and gender studies.[92] In the scholarship generated by this renewed interest in Birgitta and the *Revelations*, the woman and the work have also been reintroduced into the literary context of Trecento Italy and studied in comparison with other contemporary authors who opposed the Avignon papacy, such as Petrarch.[93]

The present volume seeks to provide introductions to the various fields of Birgittine scholarship, the primary sources, and the multiple perspectives and debates that characterize the ongoing investigation of Birgitta, her order, and her *Revelations*, as well as to offer fresh analyses of the sources. The book opens with two chapters in which Birgitta's status as a visionary, a prophet, and an author is considered from two different perspectives. In Chapter 1, F. Thomas Luongo's main focus is on the complex question of what it means to think about Birgitta as the author of divine revelations. Based on an analysis

90 See especially Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*. Both Morris and Sahlin have published numerous articles on Birgittine subjects. See also Salmesvuori, *Power and Sainthood*; Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*.

91 Disregarding the medieval Middle English versions, excerpts of the *Revelations* have previously been published in English in Tjader Harris, *Birgitta of Sweden*; Julia Bolton Holloway, *Saint Bride and her Book: Birgitta of Sweden's Revelations*, 2nd ed. (Woodbridge: 2000).

92 Evidence of this is found in the many publications from international conferences on Birgittine studies, which The Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities continuously supports; see Claes Gejrot, Sara Risberg, and Mia Åkestam (eds.), *Saint Birgitta, Syon and Vadstena: Papers from a Symposium in Stockholm 4–6 October 2007* (Stockholm: 2010); Claes Gejrot, Mia Åkestam, and Roger Andersson (eds.), *The Birgittine Experience* (Stockholm: 2013). Elin Andersson, Claes Gejrot, E.A. Jones, and Mia Åkestam (eds.), *Continuity and Change* (Stockholm: 2017). See also Härdelin and Lindgren, *Heliga Birgitta*.

93 See, for instance, Falkeid, *The Avignon Papacy Contested*, in which Birgitta's *Revelations* are studied alongside works by Dante, Petrarch, Marsilius of Padova, William of Ockham, and Catherine of Siena. Recently, David Wallace has suggested including Birgitta, together with her contemporary, Catherine of Siena, in the canon of Trecento literature, *Le tre corone*, which otherwise includes Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch. See David Wallace (ed.), *Europe: A Literary History, 1348–1418*, 2 vols (Oxford: 2016).

of the evidence in her texts of a writerly self-consciousness, Birgitta's practices of composition, and the apparently contradictory comments by her followers and hagiographers about her saintly authorship, Luongo sketches out a more complex image of the relationship between divine inspiration and human imagination than what has previously been appreciated in the Birgittine scholarship. In Chapter 2, Anders Piltz approaches the question of divine authorship from another angle and focuses on Birgitta's understanding of Scripture. Piltz explores Birgitta's image of herself as a visionary in relation to biblical and scholastic notions of prophecy, and he investigates the biblical intertexts in the *Revelations* in order to demonstrate the extent to which she was inspired by, and engaged with, the Scriptures in her self-styling as a prophet.

Chapter 3, by Unn Falkeid, addresses Birgitta's political visions. On the basis of a study of revelations and letters collected in *Tractatus de summis pontificibus* and *Liber celestis imperatoris*, Falkeid discusses Birgitta's views on reform, and religious and secular rule, and places her firmly in the context of political thinking of the period.

In Chapter 4, Anna Fredriksson investigates the opposition against Birgitta's *Revelations*, and in particular their status as "celestial," at the church councils in the decades following her canonization. Through a careful assessment of the primary sources available, Fredriksson demonstrates the nature of the attacks on and defenses of Birgitta and her work that were presented, and how these sources were later received.

In the next two chapters, the focus is on Birgitta's order and the reception of the *Revelations* within that specific context. In Chapter 5, Birgitta Fritz offers a survey of the history of the motherhouse of Birgitta's order, Vadstena Abbey, from its foundation in the late 14th century up to the Reformation. Roger Andersson, in Chapter 6, analyses the surviving evidence relating to the preaching of the Vadstena priest-brothers. In his reading of the sermons, Andersson seeks to uncover the image of the saint and the status of her writings that emerges in these sources, with a particular focus on the sermons stemming from the time after 1436 when the promulgation of the *Revelations* as "celestial" was prohibited.

In Chapter 7, Maria H. Oen studies the program of illuminations developed specifically for the distribution of the Birgittine corpus. The chapter opens with a presentation and reexamination of the rhetorical strategies employed in the miniatures in the oldest extant codices containing the *Revelations* dating from the time prior to the author's canonization. Oen then turns to other later manuscripts and explores how the form and meaning of this visual program gradually changed as the texts spread in various social and linguistic milieus over the following decades.

In the last three chapters of the volume, the cult of Birgitta and the reception of the *Revelations* in different areas of Europe are investigated. Based on artworks and popular sermons, Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby explores the image of Birgitta in Dominican, Franciscan, and Birgittine communities in Tuscany, while Pavlína Rychterová assesses the dissemination and reception of the *Revelations* in the Holy Roman Empire in the later Middle Ages. In the final chapter, Ann M. Hutchison traces the influence of Birgitta and Birgittine spirituality in late medieval England.

CHAPTER 1

God's Words, or Birgitta's? Birgitta of Sweden as Author

F. Thomas Luongo

What does it mean to call Birgitta of Sweden an author? This might seem an odd question, since it is precisely as an author—of the *Liber celestis revelacionum* or books of *Revelations*—that she is best known. Nevertheless, for Birgitta and other saintly or inspired authors, especially female ones, their lack of formal learning, their apparent spontaneity, and their dependence on scribes and confessors have led scholars to assume that they lacked the self-awareness, intention, and univocal agency we expect of authors. When the texts of female spiritual authors are taken seriously, they are often placed into categories apart from "literature" as it is ordinarily understood, and their texts treated as expressions of asceticism or responses to their experience of divine things rather than as intentional engagement with writing. And whether their texts are considered examples of "mystic" or "prophetic" literature or consigned to some other category, their status as authors is hedged in by complications.[1]

Some of these complications are on display in Bridget Morris's essential introduction to the *Revelations* in the commentary to the recent translation by Denis Searby. There and in her earlier work, Morris takes seriously Birgitta's role in the composition of the *Revelations*, and she treats her texts as acts of imaginative interpretation. At the same time, she gives several reasons why Birgitta was "not a *litterata*":

> Her writings are normally provoked by a private meditation, a point of moral doctrine, an autobiographical reflection or event, or by people who have sought or to whom she offers advice. She lacks literary ambition in a conventional sense and does not sift her material in any way. As a whole, her writings show a resemblance to Old Testament "prophetic literature," which delivers the divine message or "word" using symbolic actions,

1 I do not wish to quarrel too much with terms like "mystic," which can be useful especially when due attention is paid to the forms of the texts so designated. See for example, Amy Hollywood, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, eds. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (Cambridge, U.K.: 2012), 1–33.

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> allegories, prophecies, and threats to render judgments and laments on the state of the world and to denounce immorality and corruption.[2]

Morris makes several important points here, each of which is worth addressing at least briefly. Even if we set aside the problematic suggestion that meditation, theological reflection, or self-exploration is not a proper starting point for "literary" writing, Morris is surely correct that Birgitta does not usually express "literary ambition," if this is taken to mean the self-awareness and overtly intentional engagement with literary techniques or forms that we find in a Petrarch or a Christine de Pizan. And it is certainly true that she did not generally "sift her material," that is, compose and shape her revelations with attention given to the ultimate form in which they would be published, as one would expect of an author. Indeed, the texts contained in the books of the *Liber celestis* were not composed by Birgitta as part of a coherent work but as individual revelations, sometimes in the form of letters, directed to their intended recipients.[3] The *Revelations* as a work of spiritual literature is the product of the editorial efforts of Alfonso of Jaén and others of her clerical circle, who organized the selected revelations into books and (one assumes) made some corrections and changes.[4] Indeed, her confessors were so involved in the process of composition that Morris and other Birgittine scholars have concluded that we cannot assume that the text of the *Revelations* as we have it is in every instance Birgitta's words, rather than those of her confessors.[5] In a very basic way, of course, the text is not her words—or at least not her original words, but translations

2 Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Denis Searby, with Introductions and Notes by Bridget Morris, 4 vols (Oxford: 2006–15), vol. 1: 9. On Birgitta's revelations as prophetic literature, see also Chapter 2 by Anders Piltz in this book.

3 The *vita* written for Birgitta's canonization process (the "process vita") notes how she wrote and sent *epistolas* to both ecclesiastical and secular world leaders. See AP, 86.

4 On the textual history of the *Revelations*, see the introductions of Carl-Gustaf Undhagen and Hans Aili in Rev. I and Rev. IV, respectively. See also Hans Aili, "St. Birgitta and the Text of the *Revelationes*. A Survey of Some Influences Traceable to Translators and Editors," in *The Editing of Theological and Philosophical Texts from the Middle Ages*, ed. Monika Asztalos (Stockholm: 1986), 75–91; Hans Aili and Jan Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae: The Earliest Illuminated Manuscripts and Panel Paintings Related to the Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, 2 vols (Stockholm: 2003); and Roger Ellis, "The Divine Message and its Human Agents: St. Birgitta and her Editors," *Studies in St. Birgitta and the Brigittine Order* 35 (1993): 209–33.

5 As Bridget Morris notes, the text of the *Revelations* cannot be taken to be purely Birgitta's voice, isolated from her clerical circle, but is rather an interpretation and wording "imposed upon" her visions "in collaboration with her confessors" ("Introduction," in Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations*, vol. 1: 8). And for Claire L. Sahlin, "One cannot presume that the extant writings are Birgitta's precise words or exact reflections of her visions and thoughts" (*Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* [Woodbridge: 2001], 32).

from Swedish into Latin. It is not clear how much mastery Birgitta had of Latin and whether it was sufficient for her to have contributed to the translations, but at the very least one can assume that her more Latinate confessors must have played a dominant role in the translation process.[6] So neither the form nor the content of the *Revelations* was entirely produced by her or entirely under her control, which—along with her lack of literary ambition—would seem to complicate her status as an author.[7]

But Morris raises a more complicated question about the origin and nature of Birgitta's words by suggesting that something else that separates Birgitta from conventional authors is that, like a scriptural prophet, she puts linguistic invention to the service of the "divine 'word' or message" she understood herself to have received. Birgitta identified herself, and was identified by her supporters, with scriptural prophets. Her hagiographers often compare her with female prophets like Deborah, Huldah, Miriam, and Judith, but also with Moses. For example, in the *Epistola solitarii ad reges* ("The Hermit's Letter to Kings"), an extended defense of the authority of Birgitta's revelations included as a preface for the eighth book of *Revelations*, the *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges* ("The Heavenly Emperor's Book to Kings"), Alfonso of Jaén compares Birgitta directly to Moses, and he urges the kings to whom the revelations of the eighth book are addressed not to imitate "the incredulity and hardness of heart of Pharaoh" by rejecting "this glorious book that was inscribed in the very heart of the aforesaid lady by the finger of the living God"—an image, as Claire Sahlin has pointed out, that evokes language used of Moses in Deuteronomy 9:10 and Exodus 21:18.[8]

To compare Birgitta to Moses, the greatest of the prophets and the author of the Torah, is to declare in the most dramatic way possible the authority of her *Revelations*, indeed to equate them to Scripture. But it is also to say that

6 On Birgitta's Latinity and her confessors' assessment of it, see Undhagen in Rev. 1, p. 7; and Morris, "Introduction," 12. Roger Ellis reasons that after Birgitta's scribes had translated her revelations from Swedish into Latin, they read them back to her retranslated into Swedish so she could check them against her memory of the original—in other words, that she did not have sufficient Latin to check the translation itself ("Divine Message and its Human Agents," 210).

7 Our expectations of authorship differ from medieval ones, which were less preoccupied with the solitary writer and could accommodate more easily group efforts—as, for instance, in the analysis of scriptural authorship as discussed below. At the same time, there is a big difference between Birgitta's persona as author and that of 14th-century authors like Dante, Petrarch, or Christine de Pizan—all of whom were associated with their texts as authors in ways we can more easily recognize as authorial (partly, of course, because our ideas of authorship depend to some extent on their models).

8 Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations*, vol. 4: 15–18; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 175.

Birgitta's texts were in some sense authored by God as well as by Birgitta, or perhaps by God and *not* by Birgitta. And Morris's point—if I understand her correctly—about what makes the prophetic character of Birgitta's texts distinct from conventional "literary" texts is that the messages they convey originated from God rather than from Birgitta herself. Here I think that Morris touches on an important point that is a preoccupation in the *Revelations* themselves, and one that resonates within the Birgitta hagiography as well as debates about the nature of her texts and the authenticity of her revelations during her lifetime and in the years after her death: whose words are the words of Birgitta's *Revelations*? Is Birgitta or God really the author of the *Liber celestis revelacionum*?

This is an either/or choice that Birgittine scholars have with good reason resisted. However difficult at times it might be to discern Birgitta's voice in her *Revelations* as distinct from those of her heavenly interlocutors, scholars have treated the text of the *Revelations* as an interpretation of her visionary experience by Birgitta (or by Birgitta and her confessors/scribes) and as a vehicle for imaginative invention and theological reflection and exploration.[9] On the compatibility of divine inspiration and human authorship, Roger Ellis has noted that a "published revelation is the record of a collaboration between God and his human agents," in which the visionary chooses the "form of human speech" in which "to represent and communicate the message" she has received.[10] In his essay in this volume, "Birgitta and the Bible," Anders Piltz emphasizes Birgitta's sense of herself as a human author as well as a prophet, and the role of Scripture in helping her "structure and rationalize her intense mental energies," and he has summarized medieval theories of scriptural authorship as holding that God did not reveal a text to the inspired author, but rather "a mental content that required and still requires the active collaboration of the recipients. Those who receive the word of God are responsible for its further formulation."[11] Indeed, by the 14th century theologians readily accommodated the participation of both divine inspiration and human agency in the production of scriptural texts, so that the human authors were considered to have contributed the work of their own minds to the composition of revealed

9 Roger Ellis, for example, comments on the "the difficulty of finding the visionary in her own work, and seeing her as a distinct and separate presence in it" ("The Divine Message and its Human Agents," 224). On the *Revelations* as an act of interpretation, see, for example, Morris, "Introduction," 8. On Birgitta's experience of revelation, see also Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 54–77.

10 Ellis, "The Divine Message and its Human Agents," 209.

11 Anders Piltz, "Revelation and the Human Agent: St. Birgitta and the Process of Inspiration," in *Tongues and Texts Unlimited. Studies in Honour of Tore Janson on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Anniversary*, eds. Hans Aili and Peter af Trampe (Stockholm: 2000), 188.

texts. Inspired authors of Scripture were still very much authors.[12] While the Torah presents itself as words spoken directly by God, it must also be the case that Moses was the author of the Torah. To make this point in another way, it is difficult to understand what it might have meant theologically to say that the words of the *Revelations* came solely from God. The "speech" of divine inspiration is eternal, whereas human words are temporal, with beginnings and endings. Indeed, divine "speech" is wordless; strictly speaking, it is not speech at all.[13] And while Birgitta's followers, as we will see, emphasized that she received from God intellectual vision—that is, imageless inspiration, beyond words and beyond her own faculties—there is no problem in theory with the idea that Birgitta's imagination was in play in her visions and in the composition of the *Revelations*.[14] Indeed, the idea that Birgitta can only apprehend divine truths through figurative representations of them is a recurring theme in the *Revelations* themselves.[15] But the words of the text of the *Revelations* cannot be simply what Birgitta was given through intellectual vision, since (as we will see) intellectual vision is imageless and eternal. (It is important to note that in this respect there is no significant distinction between Birgitta's auditory experiences and her visual ones—between what Birgitta *heard* and what Birgitta

12 A.J. Minnis has shown how by the later Middle Ages theologians tended to recognize and focus on the *modi agendi* (what we might call literary style) of the human authors of Scripture. They appropriated terms from Aristotle which aided them in explaining the roles played by both God and by the human authors in the production of inspired texts, so that God by inspiring human authors could be understood as the primary efficient cause, and human authors the instrumental efficient causes. See Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: 2009), xiii; 83–84. For a discussion of this sort of analysis in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, see Thomas Gilby, "Biblical Inspiration," in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (New York: 1964), vol. 1: 143–46.

13 As, for instance, in Augustine's recounting in *Confessions* of the vision he and Monica experienced at Ostia, and how they knew that they were no longer in the presence of divine Wisdom itself when they "returned to the sound of our own speech, in which each word has a beginning and an ending—far, far different from your Word, our Lord, who abides in himself forever, yet never grows old and gives new life to all things." Amy Hollywood cites this passage, in which Augustine "explicitly contrasts his and his mother's momentary grasp of the divine Word to human speech," as illustrating a central theme in Christian mystic literature: "The limitation of human language for God is a recurrent theme within the Christian tradition and one that is often tied to the question of temporality." ("Introduction," Hollywood and Beckman, *Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, 1–3.)

14 See F. Thomas Luongo, "Inspiration and Imagination: Visionary Authorship in the Early Manuscripts of the *Revelations* of Birgitta of Sweden," *Speculum* 93, no. 4 (2018): 1102–50.

15 On this theme, see the discussion of the Mathias of Linköping's adaptation of Aristotelian poetics (by way of Averroes's commentaries) and its application to, and possible influence on, representation in Birgitta's *Revelations* in Mats Malm, *The Soul of Poetry Redefined: Vacillations of Mimesis from Aristotle to Romanticism* (Copenhagen: 2012), 61–74.

saw. Both are images, things she perceived through her faculties.) It is hard to see how any of Birgitta's clerical supporters could have believed that the words of Birgitta's *Revelations*, however much inspired, were simply God's words and not hers—or that she was any less involved in the creation of her texts than scriptural authors were in theirs.

But this point is far from obvious in the writings of Birgitta's followers. They valued her revelations for the access they gave to the mind of God—not the mind of Birgitta—and they and Birgitta herself claimed that the text of the *Revelations* was God's words. For example, her early confessor Mathias of Linköping, an influential scriptural scholar, had Birgitta seek directly from God answers to questions that had confounded him while writing his commentary on the Apocalypse. And he stresses that God, and not Birgitta, was the author of her revelations in the *Stupor et mirabilia*, a prologue that he wrote in the 1340s for an early collection of revelations, which was retained as the general prologue to the entire corpus of the *Liber celestis revelacionum* when it was compiled by Alfonso of Jaén and others in the 1370s—a role it continues to serve in standard editions today. Master Mathias begins by quoting the prophet Jeremiah, *Stupor et mirabilia audita sunt in terra nostra*, ("Wonders and marvels have been heard in our land"), and proceeds to stress the sheer marvel of the existence of Birgitta's revelations as a manifestation of God's presence. Mathias presents Birgitta as a passive vessel for divine inspiration and explicitly not an author: her revelations are the words "not of her who is empty of power but of him who is full of the power of truth," (Prol. M.: 30) and Birgitta "would not have been able to make it up [the revelations] even had she wanted to, since she was a simple and gentle soul" (Prol. M.: 41). Similarly, the Process Vita (so called because it was written for her canonization process) emphasizes that Birgitta, when she began to receive visions and divine commands, did not assume that they were genuine or presume to interpret them or exercise any independent judgment of her experiences, but rather submitted her visions to the review of clerical authorities. Moreover, she made her revelations public only in response to Christ's commands, not out of any desire of her own to see them published. For the authors of the Process Vita, as for Master Mathias, what was important to stress about Birgitta was what she received from God, not what she might have contributed by her own abilities. As the Process Vita emphasizes, what made Birgitta a prophet (indeed, what makes anyone a prophet) was precisely that her words were given to her through the light of divine inspiration, beyond her own faculties: "She had from God the true spirit of prophecy, and intellectual vision divinely given to her." And Birgitta's critics, as if to confirm the importance her followers gave to God's authorship of the

Revelations, challenged the authenticity of the *Liber celestis* by arguing that she was too much responsible for them. Indeed, Jean Gerson, the most important voice against Birgitta's *Revelations*, attacked the authority of the *Revelations* and their reputation as quasi-scriptural texts precisely by asserting that they were the product of Birgitta's imagination—that Birgitta, and not God, was their author.[16]

Part of the contradiction here between the compatibility in theory of God's authorship with human authorship and the insistence on an either/or choice between God and Birgitta has to do with the fact that the question of whether or not her revelations were divinely inspired—whether they deserved the status of Scripture—was exactly what was at issue during her life and after her death during disputes over the authenticity of her *Revelations*. To state the obvious, whereas the authority of scriptural authors was assumed *a priori*, Birgitta was not a scriptural author but a contemporary woman. There has been much written about how, in the later Middle Ages, clerical authorities became increasingly suspicious of the visionary experience of women and imposed through the "science" of *discretio spirituum* (discernment of spirits) an understanding of visions and similar experiences according to which the authenticity of the visionary depended on a radical "suppression of agency" by the visionary herself—a suppression of agency that led female mystics in general to express an aversion to writing, and to write (ostensibly at least) only at divine or clerical command.[17] Authorship demands some measure of agency or control of the words of the text, not to mention knowledge or craft—this was true of medieval ideas about authorship as much as it is true of modern ones—but

16 On the opposition of Gerson and others to Birgitta, see Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 136–68; Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*: *The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbridge: 1999), 222–23; and Chapter 4 by Anna Fredriksson in this volume. On responses by her defenders, see Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 169–220; and Roger Ellis, "Text and Controversy: In Defense of St. Birgitta of Sweden," in *Text and Controversy from Wyclif to Bale: Essays in Honour of Anne Hudson*, eds. Helen Barr and Ann M. Hutchison (Turnhout: 2005), 303–21.

17 On these issues see especially Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80, no. 1 (2005): 1–43. For Newman, "the dominant theology of visionary experience called for exclusive agency—whether divine, diabolical, or human—and had great difficulty admitting the possibility of mixture" (p. 25). On *discretio spirituum*, see Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: 2003); Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*; Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: 2004); and Wendy Love Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages* (Tübingen: 2011).

that very agency or control would seem to weaken Birgitta's claims to authentic inspiration.[18] By this logic, if Birgitta was in any sense the author of her *Revelations*, then they could not come have come from God; and if Birgitta's *Revelations* came from God, then God and not Birgitta had to be their author.

It is telling of the contradictions involved in the hagiographical insistence on the divine authorship of the *Revelations* that while Birgitta's followers generally emphasize her passivity before God, they sometimes stress Birgitta's activity, at least in part to minimize their own contributions and to guarantee the words of the *Revelations* as authentically Birgitta's.[19] While it might be obvious to us that Mathias of Linköping, Alfonso of Jaén, and others contributed to the text of the *Revelations*, evidence of their contribution is something they strove to avoid. It is in this context that we should probably read the assertion by the authors of the Process Vita that Birgitta usually wrote her revelations herself in Swedish, and then checked the Latin translations for accuracy, which is probably an oversimplification. It seems likely that Birgitta often dictated her revelations to scribes rather than wrote them herself, and that when she did write, as Morris has suggested, the volume and length of her revelations make it likely that she wrote draft notes (perhaps on wax tablets), to be expanded later into Latin with the help of her confessors, rather than that she wrote out her revelations completely in Swedish.[20] On the one hand, for Birgitta's hagiographers

18 As A.J. Minnis has noted, the word *auctor* "was supposed to be related to the Latin verbs *agere* 'to act or perform,' *augere* 'to grow,' and *auieo* 'to tie,' and to the Greek noun *autentim* 'authority.' An *auctor* 'performed' the act of writing. He brought something into being, caused it to 'grow'" (Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 10). Among many other discussions of medieval ideas of authorship, see M.D. Chenu, "Auctor, Actor, Autor," *Bulletin du Cange: Archivium Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 3 (1927): 81–86.

19 Birgitta's passivity in relation to God was, of course, not necessarily incompatible with her active involvement in the cultivation of her visions. As Jessica Barr has observed, the passive role was one that visionaries chose, embracing passivity as an act of will: "In order to understand their revelations fully, visionaries frequently must direct their wills towards God (thereby becoming suitably passive vessels through the paradoxically active engagement of their vocational faculties) and, in many cases, interpret and analyze the content of the revelations themselves" (*Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages* [Columbus, Ohio: 2010], 18). Barbara Newman has also pointed out that the adoption of a passive role with relation to God is itself a choice, and one that should not be seen as inherently diminishing: "The common prejudice which views the passive role as demeaning and undignified, or at any rate inferior to the active, assumes the absence of "… [a] divine point of reference" ("Divine Power Made Perfect in Weakness: St. Hildegard on the Frail Sex," in *Peace Weavers: Medieval Religious Women*, eds. J.A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank [Kalamazoo: 1987], vol. 2: 109–10).

20 Bridget Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden* (Woodbridge: 1999), 3–6. The main description of her writing practice is in AP, 84.

her words were not hers at all, but God's. On the other hand, her words had to be hers, at least so that they would not seem to be the creation of her scribes and clerical supporters. After all, Birgitta's reputation spread to a large extent through the dissemination of the books of her revelations, including the deluxe manuscripts of the *Revelations* commissioned by Alfonso of Jaén in part for the use of the papal commissions considering her canonization. These books had to be attributed to her; how else could they have been evidence of her sanctity? Indeed, the manuscripts produced under Alfonso's direction include lavish illustrations that intended to make Birgitta present as the author of the *Liber celestis*, even as they evoke models of scriptural prophecy that attribute ultimate authorship to God.[21]

To sum up, the idea that Birgitta was the author of her *Revelations*—that she chose the words through which to interpret her experience of divine things—is the only account of the origin of her texts that makes sense, not only according to modern assumptions but also medieval theories of inspiration. Birgitta's authorship was also essential in the sense that her identity as a saint was tied to a large extent to her *Revelations*, whose dissemination in manuscripts throughout Europe was central to the spread of her reputation and cult. At the same time, what was uncontroversial when applied to a scriptural author—the role of human imagination in conveying divine truths—was bound to be controversial in the case of Birgitta. To some extent this problem is related to a standard theme in Christian mysticism, which is the challenge of talking about God in human speech—in other words, the problem of the relationship of human words to the Word. But whereas Christian mystics typically emphasize their inability to describe in words that which lies beyond words, divinity itself, Birgitta and her supporters made what is in its own way a more complicated claim, which is that her words should have the status of Scripture—that they are in some sense God's words.

It is worth noting that this claim is not made throughout the Birgittine texts in precisely the same way; the divine origin of her words is especially at issue in certain instances where, as we will see, she is claiming to be conveying

21 See Luongo, "Inspiration and Imagination." On representation of Birgitta in the early manuscripts, see Chapter 7 by Maria H. Oen in this volume. See also the comments of Jan Svanberg in Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*; Anette Creutzburg, *Die heilige Birgitta von Schweden. Bildliche Darstellungen und theologische Kontroversen im Vorfeld ihrer Kanonisation (1373–1391)* (Kiel: 2011); and Maria H. Oen, "Sight, Body, and Imagery in the Visionary Experience of Birgitta," in *The Birgittine Experience: Papers from the Birgitta Conference in Stockholm 2011*, eds. Claes Gejrot, Mia Åkestam, and Roger Anderson (Stockholm: 2013), 191–208; and Maria H. Oen, "The Visions of St. Birgitta: A Study of the Making and Reception of Images in the Later Middle Ages" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oslo, 2015).

divine conversation or dictation verbatim. But that these exceptional moments raise with particular force a problem related to the general understanding of Birgitta's *Revelations* as divinely inspired can be seen in the controversies over the corpus in the decades following her death, and even after Birgitta's canonization in 1391. For example, Gerson's objection to Birgitta's *Revelations* was based to some extent on his assessment of her accounts of her conversations with Christ, which struck him as suspiciously familiar and chatty—in effect, the product of the mind of an uneducated woman rather than a true revelation. And the occasion for reevaluation of Birgitta's *Revelations* at the Council of Basel was a move to modify the way of life of the community at Vadstena, and the community's assertion that its rule was inviolable in every particular because it had been dictated by God verbatim. This claim by the Birgittines in effect brought the authority of the entire corpus of the *Revelations* into play. The result was that the council rejected the naming of the *Revelations* as "heavenly" in the title given to them: *liber celestis revelacionum* or *liber celestium revelacionum*. And it forbade promulgation of the *Revelations* without expert theological explanations of problematic passages—in effect, casting doubt on the orthodoxy and authenticity of the entire contents of Birgitta's *Revelations*. The council's judge explicitly rejected the claim of the Birgittines that "one should have the same faith in [Birgitta's] revelations … as in the Gospels."[22]

In what remains of this essay, I will take up the problem of Birgitta's inspired authorship in several places in the Birgittine corpus where the divine source of Birgitta's words is emphasized in a special way, including Alfonso's argument for the authenticity of Birgitta's visions in the *Epistola solitarii* and three key moments in the *Revelations* themselves. As we will see, there is only one place in Birgitta's texts where she comes close to explaining the relationship between her words and divine revelation. More often, Birgitta and her followers focus on the authority granted her words by the fact that they are revealed—on their connection to the Word rather than on how the Word becomes words in her texts. As explanations of how inspiration moves from God to text, their accounts are full of contradictions and ambiguities. But as I will argue in conclusion, these comments on the divine source of Birgitta's words

22 On the disputes at Basel, see Anna Fredriksson Adman, "Introduction," in *Heymericus de Campo: Dyalogus super Reuelacionibus beate Birgitte. A Critical Edition with an Introduction* (Uppsala: 2003), 15–61; and Anna Fredriksson Adman, "An Heretical Saint? The Birgittine Case and Heymericus de Campo at the Council of Basel," in *University, Council, City: Intellectual Culture on the Rhine, 1300–1550*, eds. Laurent Cesalli, Nadja Germann, and Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen (Turnhout: 2007), 277–89. See also Chapter 4 by Anna Fredriksson in the present volume.

can be understood as a way of talking about the nature of Birgitta's revelations as text and are essential to her identity as an author.

1 Alfonso of Jaén's *Epistola solitarii*

Alfonso spells out in detail what the Process Vita means by linking the authenticity of Birgitta's status as a prophet to her having received "intellectual vision" from God, in the *Epistola solitarii ad reges*, ostensibly a prologue to the eighth book of *Revelations* but in fact an elaborate argument for the authenticity of the entire corpus of Birgitta's revelations.[23] By crediting Birgitta with intellectual vision, Alfonso probably intended to defend her against critics who considered her visions untrustworthy because of their image-based, or "imaginary" content. Alfonso depends on Augustine's taxonomy of visionary experience in *De Genesi ad litteram* to argue that Birgitta's visionary experiences usually fit into the category of spiritual or imaginary seeing—where one sees in image something that is not there in the body. So, for instance, when Birgitta saw Christ or the Virgin Mary or a saint, and that heavenly personage spoke to her, she saw and heard spiritually, or in image. But intellectual vision is imageless apprehension of divine truth. Augustine argues, and all the authorities follow him, that while vision involving images can be false—delusional or diabolical—intellectual vision is completely trustworthy. Without going into his argument in great detail, the important point for Alfonso is that Birgitta, in addition to her image-based vision, and sometimes through her image-based vision, also received divinely infused, imageless, intellectual vision—which being imageless is a form of inspiration that is completely beyond human faculties. And that is what makes her a prophet.

Sometimes "she saw visions and heard the voice of someone speaking in spirit"; in other words, "she saw images or forms in her spirit and heard locutions in her visions."[24] But sometimes through these spiritual images or voices she received imageless, intellectual inspiration. Alfonso gives as examples the visions that resulted in Book V of the *Revelations*, known as the *Liber questionum*, and the vision in which she received the *Regula Salvatoris*—the rule on which her new religious order was based. Birgitta, rapt from her senses, saw Christ in image or spirit, and in the same experience received from Him something she perceived not in image but through "a supernatural influx of

23 ES.

24 ES: 5.30–32.

intellectual light."[25] As to what this means, Alfonso cites a lengthy passage from Gregory the Great's discussion of divine ways of speaking in Book 28 of *Moralia in Iob*. Sometimes God speaks through others, but sometimes by himself, through divine internal locution. In that case, "the heart is taught his words without words and syllables" through "an incorporeal light" that "renders the ignorant human heart suddenly knowledgeable about mysteries without the noise or slowness of speech"; this divine locution is "seen inwardly rather than heard," instilled "without the delay of speech."[26] And it is the addition of intellectual vision to what Birgitta saw in image, and through what Birgitta saw in image, that makes her a prophet:

> From what has been said and from the very contents of the books of divine revelations to this venerable lady, it is evident that God had granted her the singular grace of a prophetic spirit. This divine grace was given through God's inward locutions to her and through spiritual and intellectual visions. The cause of true and genuine prophecy and revelation together with knowledge and doctrine is the spiritual or imaginary vision of bodies or signs with the added influx of the intellectual and supernatural light of divine truth.[27]

And Alfonso appeals to Thomas Aquinas' discussion of prophecy in the *Summa theologiae* to argue that "when a soul, either in a corporeal or imaginary and spiritual vision, experiences the influx of the supernatural light of intelligible truth, which gives her insight into the true meaning of what she has seen and heard," that light is itself a sign that her vision is divine and not diabolical. That influx of light, "whether a corporeal or imaginary vision precedes it or not, can never be transmitted into the soul by the devil but only by God."[28]

As I have argued elsewhere, the *Epistola solitarii*'s reconciliation of image-based and imageless intellectual vision makes a robust case, at least indirectly, for the role of the imagination in Birgitta's inspired texts.[29] Alfonso's purpose is to stress what Birgitta received from outside her faculties and could not be produced by those faculties: divine, imageless intellectual vision. But his treatise has implications for the relationship between divine inspiration and Birgitta's own role in the composition of her revelations. Linking her experience of

25 ES: 5.34.
26 ES: 5.40–48.
27 ES: 5.58–61.
28 ES: 6.45–47.
29 Luongo, "Inspiration and Imagination."

intellectual vision to what she saw "in image or species" in effect brings her faculties—her imagination as well as her intellect—into play. There is an ambiguity in Alfonso's argument—a missing middle term. After all, if the "divine, internal locution" of intellectual vision is a communication *without words*, what does it mean to say Christ spoke to Birgitta the words of her *Revelations*? Where did the words come from?

2 God's Words in the *Revelations*

Birgitta's answer to this question, in the many instances in the *Revelations* in which her authority and status as God's messenger are asserted, seems to be that the words themselves come from God. The revelations emphasize Birgitta's passivity as God's messenger. She is a conduit or channel (*canalis*) through which God's wisdom flows; or a vessel or a flask into which God pours wine or his saving waters ("You are my flask. I shall fill you whenever I like and drain you whenever I please"[30]); or as God's "instrument."[31] On the nature and origin of the text we are reading, the revelations repeat many times that what Birgitta is receiving from God (directly or through the Virgin Mary or some other figure) is the very words of the revelations.[32] As has been pointed out many times, while many of Birgitta's *Revelations* refer to things seen, most depend on things heard—words spoken to her by Christ, God the Father, the Virgin Mary, or some saint or angel. Indeed, while Birgitta is sometimes shown things or told things that she does not understand how to interpret, the explanations of what she has seen or heard are themselves presented in the form of revelations:

> My bride, I have chosen you and clothed you in my spirit. You hear my words and those of my saints who, although they see all things in me, yet have spoken for your sake, so that you might understand. After all, you, who are still in the body, cannot see in me in the same way as they who are spirits. I will now show you what these things mean.[33]

30 Rev. IV: 77.15.

31 Extrav.: 46. On the meaning and importance of the term *canale*, see Piltz, "Birgitta and the Bible," in the present volume.

32 See Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 76–77: "the *Revelations* record God's or Christ's direct speech, just as the messages of the Hebrew prophets are presented as words spoken directly by the Lord."

33 Rev. I: 5.11–12.

In this account, the meanings of her visions are dictated to her by her heavenly interlocutor, rather than, say, Birgitta's working out herself the meaning of what she sees or (in Alfonso's terms) having her intellect enlightened through a wordless influx of supernatural light (whether conveyed directly or through images). The meanings of her visions are conveyed within or by the words she perceived in the visions.

Sometimes it is possible to understand the "words" Birgitta receives metaphorically, as meaning something more like "message," or the Gospel itself; for instance, Christ calls the Gospel "my saving words"[34] and elsewhere refers to people who are, or are not, following his words. But in many more places the text represents itself as the very words spoken by Christ, for example: "This person heard a voice saying to her: 'Hear, you who see spiritual visions, and speak what you are now taught, and write the words you now hear to the Roman pontiff Gregory.'"[35] This point is driven home in Rev. VII: 11, where Christ specifically tells Birgitta to paraphrase the text of a message he has given her for the queen of Naples, (presumably) to soften what would otherwise be too harsh or too difficult to understand: "Write these things in lighter and fewer words, as the Holy Spirit will inflame you, and send them with my bishop to the queen."[36] Christ's instruction that Birgitta compose a message in her own words (as opposed to His) under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit suggests a more complicated mixing of human and divine involvement in the composition of inspired texts. Nevertheless, the obvious implication is that her revelations normally are Christ's very words, indeed that the text of this revelation—what Birgitta is being commanded to paraphrase and the words we are reading—is the very words given by Christ to Birgitta, and not Birgitta's words.

While the *Revelations* frequently assert the divine origins of the words of the text, there are a few places in which Birgitta explores in greater depth the relationship between the divine Word and her own. It is not insignificant that two of them are connected to visions that Alfonso identified in the *Epistola solitarii* as including intellectual vision, that is, the imageless and wordless influx of divine illumination: these are the *Regula Salvatoris* and Book V of the *Revelations*, the *Liber questionum*. A third place is Chapter 49 of the *Revelaciones extravagantes*, a collection of revelations excluded by Alfonso

34 For example, Rev. IV: 113.
35 Rev. IV: 140.
36 Rev. VII: 11.22.

from the canonical corpus, but nevertheless preserved by him and collected after his death.[37]

3 God's Words in the *Regula Salvatoris*

It is not surprising that the question of the divine status of Birgitta's words is especially at stake in her account of the vision in which she received the *Regula Salvatoris*, where Birgitta describes the vision in which she received the text of the rule. Emphasis on the divine origins of the rule is no doubt connected to Birgitta's hopes to gain papal approval for her new order. As mentioned already, for Birgitta and her followers the divine origins of the words of the rule meant that it could not be altered in any way. (In a revelation about the rule included in the *Extravagantes*, Christ admonishes Birgitta not to "add a single word in any way from your own spirit to my words.")[38] But apart from the question of the inviolability of the rule, Birgitta's account of the reception of the *Regula Salvatoris* is one of the most intimate and vivid descriptions in the *Revelations* of her experience of divine things. It is also one of the most distinctly and classically "mystical" moments in Birgitta's writings. She focuses directly on the mystery of the relationship between God's transcendence and immanence, and between Creator and creature, by adapting to her purposes the classic theme in Christian mysticism of the distance between the eternal divine Word and time-bound human words, which can only describe the experience of God, imperfectly, through analogy:

> From his own blessed mouth, God, the creator of the universe, entrusted to me, unworthy person that I am, all the words of this Rule in such a miraculous way and in so short a span of time that I cannot explain it to anyone. No one could possibly grasp or understand, except by way of analogy, how so many words could be uttered in an instant. It is as though a great many precious things were kept in a jar and were poured out all at once in such a way that anyone seeing it would be able to distinguish one thing from another right away, and all the things lasted long enough in front of the person to be gathered in his or her lap.[39]

37 On the textual history of these revelations, see the analysis in the modern edition: Extrav.: 28–45; and Morris' introduction in Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations*, vol. 4: 219–27.

38 Extrav.: 46.

39 RS: 29.

But the mystic theme of the inadequacy of human words applies here only to her description of the experience, and not to the words of the inspired text. Birgitta is able to "distinguish one thing from another," a nice way of describing what it means to perceive human speech, in which the words have beginnings and endings—indeed, whose meaning is based on our ability to distinguish one word from another. Christ dictates to her the words of the *Regula Salvatoris* miraculously, but also in a way that she is able to perceive them through her senses:

> Similarly, when Jesus Christ appeared to me and opened his blessed lips and began to speak, all the articles of this Rule with all the words contained in it were suddenly before me for a short moment. It is not as though they were written down on paper. He alone knows how they could be heard so miraculously and understood through his marvelous power so that my senses could distinguish one thing from another. The vision lasted long enough for me to gather everything in the lap of my memory with the help of Christ's grace.[40]

Here we are back to the ambiguity of Alfonso's discussion in the *Epistola solitarii*, with Birgitta somehow receiving the words of her revelation—here the words of her rule—through a divine dictation that is, by its nature, wordless. Consistent with Alfonso of Jaén's designation of this revelation as an example of intellectual vision, Birgitta emphasizes that what she perceived was (practically) instantaneous, not words dictated over a period of time. Alfonso describes how Birgitta sometimes received the influx of imageless, purely intellectual inspiration from within what she perceived through images. Birgitta emphasizes here how the imageless inspiration conveys images—the words of the *Regula Salvatoris* themselves—that she was able to perceive through her senses.

Birgitta elides any role she might have played in the composition of the text, referring to her faculties only in her ability to distinguish the words presented to her and in the role played by her memory as depository of those words. But her conclusion hints at something more like the ordinary human process of inspiration in the process of literary composition:

> After this vision my heart was so full of zeal and joy that there was no more room for anything else—any more would have been the end of me, my heart would have burst with joy. My heart swelled like a ball full of

40 RS: 29.

> air for some days, while I related all the articles and the words contained in the Rule to a monk, a friend of God, who wrote everything down as quickly as possible. When everything was written down, I felt my heart and body slowly return to their natural state. Praise and glory to almighty God! Amen.[41]

Bridget Morris, among others, has concluded (reasonably) that Birgitta could not have dictated the entire *Regula Salvatoris* from memory over the course of a few days—indeed, that the composition of the rule must have been a group effort over a much longer extent of time.[42] On the other hand, one might read this description of divine dictation as a particularly dramatic example of the kind of moment of inspiration all of us have probably experienced at one time or another, where the outline of an argument or a plot, the precise phrasing of a difficult passage, or the solution to a problem becomes suddenly clear, usually when we are not at our desks or not working on the text or problem. (The eagerness or anxiety to get it down on paper before it is forgotten is certainly familiar!) In such cases there is always more work to do, to flesh out what has been perceived in outline or work out the implications of the inspired insight. And as we have seen, the works of the canonical Scriptures were understood to be the products of human minds as well as divine inspiration, and it is implausible that Birgitta as a prophetic author would be any different. But Birgitta here directs attention away from the involvement of her own faculties, and even away from the mystic trope of the incapacity of human words to describe divinity. She focuses instead on the meeting of the eternal Word and time-bound, created human words not in order to emphasize the distance of human words from the divine Word, but rather to emphasize the special capacity and legitimacy of her words as revelations she has received from God.

4 God's Words and Human Words in the *Liber questionum*

A more expansive account of the relationship between the divine Word and human words is presented in the other example of intellectual vision cited by Alfonso, the fifth book of the *Revelations* also known as the *Liber questionum*

41 RS: 29.

42 Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations*, vol. 4: 110: "Even if the rule is popularly presented as a single revelation received and hastily written down in the 1340s, it is more likely to be the product of a whole lifetime's ambition and careful consideration by Birgitta and her circle."

("Book of Questions"), an account of a vision Birgitta experienced in the 1340s. The *Liber questionum* is unique among Birgittine texts in that it is presented as a coherent work rather than a compilation of individual revelations.[43] It is based on a vision Birgitta experienced of a monk standing on a ladder extending to the heavens and asking questions of Christ. The book is structured around the questions posed by the monk to Christ, and Christ's responses: sixteen *interrogationes* divided into sets of *questiones* and Christ's *responsiones*. It also includes other comments by the Virgin Mary and Christ and divine revelations on apparently unconnected subjects, and ends with a revelation by Christ about the Holy Land and Birgitta's voyage there—placing the book at a crucial juncture in Birgitta's career, as she prepared to embark on travels and activities outside of Sweden.[44] The theological issues addressed in the book have been read in a variety of ways: the questions posed by the monk on the ladder have been taken as reflecting issues at play in theological discussions in mid-14th-century Sweden, or as projections of Birgitta's own questions or doubts.[45] On the other hand, the questions posed by the monk raise in a very basic way some very fundamental theological issues related broadly to the nature of creation and the relationship of the divine order to the created world: God's eternity as related to human time, God's unity and perfection as related to creation's diversity (or difference) and imperfections. Is it really the case that Swedish theologians were actually debating these issues, at this level of generalization? And as for representing Birgitta's own questions, such a reading is complicated by the fact that the monk is clearly an adversary of both Christ and Birgitta. While the questioner is usually referred to as a monk—and I am using that term here, for convenience and to be consistent with Searby's translation—the text of the revelation identifies him only as *religiosus*. The earliest extant manuscript, produced in Naples under Alfonso's direction in

43 See Bridget Morris' introduction to the book in Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations*, vol. 2: 261–69. On the textual history of the book, see Birger Bergh's introduction in Rev. v, pp. 7–33. There is apparently no evidence that the book circulated independently before being included by Birgitta's editors in the *Revelations*, and it is not clear to what extent, like the other books, it was the product of editorial intervention by Birgitta's followers.

44 For a reading of the book that emphasizes its role in authorizing Birgitta's subsequent more public and international career, see Unn Falkeid, "En stige godt plantet i jorden. Teologikritikk og politisk motstand i den hellige Birgittas Frågornas bok," *Norsk Litteraturvitenskapelig Tidsskrift* 17, no. 1 (2014): 38–54.

45 See for instance, Anders Piltz: "whoever the monk is, we can assume that it is Birgitta's own questions that he is formulating. He represents the subconscious expression of the party of opposition that can be found in every believer or doubter." (Piltz, "Medeltidskyrkans genrer," 88, translated and quoted by Morris in Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations*, vol. 2: 267.)

the mid-1370s, represents him as a Dominican friar.[46] But some later manuscripts make him a Cistercian monk—perhaps representing different associations between the religious orders and scholastic learning in different places. It would probably be a mistake to take Birgitta's revelation as a comment on one religious order or another, or as reflecting a preference for mendicant as opposed to monastic religion. The main point seems to be is that he represents a type of monastic or mendicant scholar to which Birgitta (and members of her circle) objected.[47]

In a long prologue for the book he wrote in the 1370s, Alfonso describes how while riding to her castle in Vadstena Birgitta "began to lift up her mind to God in prayer" and immediately "fell into a spiritual rapture." While she was "suspended in an ecstasy of mental contemplation," she "saw in spirit" a ladder that rose from the earth to heaven, and on the ladder a monk who put questions to Christ, sitting in heaven with the Virgin Mary. Birgitta "saw and heard in spirit" what Christ replied to the religious, and the Virgin Mary added some words directed to Birgitta herself:

> In that one moment Lady Birgitta received this whole book in her mind in one and the same revelation. …The Book of Questions remained thus effectively fixed in her heart and memory, as though it had been carved on a marble tablet. She wrote it down in her own language straightaway, and then her confessor translated it into the literary language, just as he had been accustomed to translating the other books of revelations.[48]

Alfonso's attention to process here is very specific, and it anticipates the terms in which he describes the "divine, internal locution" of intellectual vision in the *Epistola solitarii*. His description of Birgitta's experience in this vision also recalls her account of the reception of the *Regula Salvatoris*, in which she miraculously saw all the words in a single instant. Here Birgitta receives the

46 Warszawa, Biblioteka Narodowa, 3310. See further Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*, vol. 1: 65–68, and Chapter 7 of the present volume for the image, as well as Luongo, "Inspiration and Imagination." As Morris notes (Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations*, vol. 2: 263–64), he appears as a Cistercian in the 15th-century Swedish manuscript known as the "Eriksberg" manuscript (Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, A 70 b, fol. 72v).

47 Master Mathias, Birgitta's confessor during her formative period in Sweden, opposed Aristotelian scholasticism in favor of more traditional methods of reading scripture. See Anders Piltz, "Magister Mathias of Sweden in his Theological Context: A Preliminary Survey," in Asztalos, *Editing of Theological and Philosophical Texts*, 137–60. The *religiosus* on the ladder seems to be a personification of the kind of master to which Mathias objected.

48 Rev. v: prol.

divine speech in one instant, without the delay of words, and she sees the words all at once, like a text on a marble tablet, as opposed to hearing them over time as with human speech—consistent with the description of intellectual vision in Gregory the Great's *Moralia*, one of Alfonso's key authorities.

But for all his specificity, ambiguities and contradictions remain. Alfonso implies that the divine internal locution that emerged from within what Birgitta saw in spirit in this vision simply constitutes the text of the Book of Questions, but it is not clear how that can be so. The *Liber questionum* is structured around a series of questions posed by the monk to Christ, and to which Christ responds, interspersed with "revelations" from the Virgin Mary and Christ directly to Birgitta. But how can the words the religious and Christ spoke to each other be part of the imageless "divine, internal locution," when Birgitta perceived them spiritually, as images? What precisely was "fixed in Birgitta's memory"? Was it the words of the book themselves? If so, why point out that she wrote the contents down in her own language? What language, or what sort of words, appeared as if "carved on a marble tablet" in her memory? We are back to some of the same points of ambiguity we saw in Alfonso's *Epistola* and in Birgitta's account of her reception of the *Regula Salvatoris*: human words revealed by the wordless divine Word, and a vision in time in which images communicate the eternal and imageless.

In the course of the vision recounted in the *Liber questionum*, it becomes clear that ambiguities and contradictions in the meeting of the divine and the human—in the very nature of revelation—are a large part of what is at issue in the exchange between the monk on the ladder and Christ. The monk is an arrogant critic of divine providence. He even objects to certain aspects of the Incarnation and protests against faults in creation, especially human imperfection. One of his main complaints involves the nature of divine communication with humans, and the limits placed on the human intellect to perceive divine things. Indeed, his position on a ladder ascending to the heavens is clearly not meant to illustrate his spiritual progress, as in the traditional uses of the ladder image in monastic literature, but his arrogance in attempting to achieve knowledge of divinity through his own intellect. (As Bridget Morris has written, the monk objects to the "veil with which God obscures His Truth.")[49] For example, he asks Christ in Interrogation 8, "Why do you not let people see your glory in this life, so that they may desire it more fervently?"[50] And in Interrogation 10 he asks, "Given that you are the most powerful and beautiful and

49 Bridget Morris, "The Monk-on-the-Ladder in Book V of St. Birgitta's *Revelaciones*," *Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift* (1982): 95–107.

50 Rev. V: Int. 8.2.

virtuous, why did you cover your divinity, which is incomparably brighter than the sun, with such a sack—I mean your human nature?"[51]

His questions along these lines intensify particularly in Interrogation 11, where he objects broadly to how Christ has, and has not, revealed Himself:

> First question. Again the monk appeared on his rung as before saying: "O Judge, ask you: Since you are God and man, why did you not reveal your divine as well as your human nature, and then everyone would have believed in you?" Second question. "Why did you not let all your words be heard in an instant, and then it would not have been necessary for them to be preached over intervals of time?" Third question. "Why did you not perform all your works in a single hour?" Fourth question. "Why did your body grow over intervals of time and not in an instant?" Fifth question. "As your death was approaching, why did you not reveal yourself in your divine power, and why did you not show your severity to your enemies, when you said, 'All is accomplished'?"[52]

The monk's attention to the time-bound nature of Christ's revelation speaks to a recurrent theme in Christian mysticism: the distinction between the eternity of the divine Word and the temporality of human speech, and the consequential limitations of human speech in describing God—and, more fundamentally, the inability of human faculties to apprehend God directly. More immediately, his questions invoke the terms of Alfonso's discussion of intellectual versus image-bound vision, and seem to ask why Christ could not have revealed Himself directly and entirely to our intellects, without the approximations and imperfections of words and images.

Christ's answer to the first question sums up His response to the others, all of which have to do with the ways in which in revelation the divine Word accommodates itself to human faculties:

> You ask, then, why I did not show my divine nature openly as I did with my human. The reason is that my divine nature is spiritual but my human nature is bodily. Yet the divine and human natures are and were inseparable ever since they were first joined together. My divinity is uncreated, and all things that exist are made in it and through it, and every perfection and beauty is found in it. If such beauty and perfection were visibly revealed to eyes of clay [i.e. to human eyes], who would be able to bear

51 Rev. v: Int. 10.1.

52 Rev. v: Int. 11.1–5.

> the sight? … If any human body were to see the divinity, it would melt like wax before fire and the soul would rejoice with such exaltation that the body would be reduced, as it were, to ashes. …Insofar as I am God, I am not bodily and cannot be portrayed in a bodily manner, but people can endure to see and hear me in my human nature.[53]

Similarly, as to why he did not let all his words be heard in an instant, Christ once again points to the limitations of human nature:

> as the food of the body is taken in a small amount at a time so that it can be chewed and then ingested, so too my words had to be uttered not in one hour but over intervals of time in proportion to the understanding of those who were to profit from them....[54]

And in response to question 3, he adds that it was necessary for believers "to be taught by words over intervals of time and to be stirred by example and strengthened by works." Any other approach would have overwhelmed not only human intellect, but also human will: "everyone would have followed me from fear rather than love."[55] In revelation, God adapts himself to human faculties.

It is clear that the monk on the ladder is offended not only by the fact that as a creature he cannot comprehend God in God's language, but also by how, when God reveals himself—presumably he means, reveals Himself through prophets and evangelists—he speaks our language, in all of its imprecision and ambiguity. This point is driven home in Interrogation 16, where the monk objects priggishly to the use of metaphors in the Gospels (he is an intellectual snob, even when addressing Christ!): "Why does the Gospel say that the goats are placed on your left and the sheep on your right? Do you really delight in such things?" And also in Interrogation 16, the monk objects to the differences between the accounts of the Gospel authors: given that they are all inspired by the Holy Spirit, should they not all be the same?[56] In response, Christ explains (patiently) the differences between his divinity and the human metaphors and similes used to understand divine things, and points out that variety in the distribution of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is inevitable.[57]

53 Rev. v: Int. 11.10–29.
54 Rev. v: Int. 11.22.
55 Rev. v: Int. 11.26.
56 Rev. v: Int. 16.
57 Rev. v: Int. 16.6–51.

The exchange between the monk on the ladder and Christ is perhaps not very profound, when regarded as an abstract consideration of theological issues. But it does make a powerful and even subtle case for Birgitta's revelations. The monk is objecting precisely to the kind of revelations that Birgitta was known for, and which appear in the *Revelations*: visions full of images, of things heard and seen, and subject to the imperfections of human faculties. In other words, Christ in the *Liber questionum* is in effect defending Birgitta against the same kinds of objections that Alfonso implicitly addresses in the *Epistola solitarii.* Against learned critics who would condemn the image-laden and narrative visions of Birgitta as unsophisticated or suspect, Christ makes it clear that God must reveal himself to humans in the way he has done to Birgitta—the only way humans can begin, however imperfectly, to perceive God. The scholarly monk on the ladder seeks to penetrate, through pure intellect, the veil that shields humans from divinity and, we are told by Christ, gains nothing from it. Unlike the proudly intellectual monk, the unlearned Birgitta accepts in all humility the limitations of her faculties and is therefore able to penetrate more deeply into the divine mysteries. Christ makes it very clear that Birgitta's revelations contain more insight than the more intellectually sophisticated discourse of scholars like the monk—indeed, that he is answering the monk's questions for Birgitta's benefit and not the monk's.

It is worth recalling Alfonso's assertion that the text of the *Liber questionum* emerged through something Birgitta perceived through imageless intellectual vision from God. Christ's responses to the monk, like Alfonso's argument in the *Epistola solitarii*, make it clear that images and other imperfections in human ways of speaking about God are compatible somehow with prophetic inspiration through intellectual vision. And again, while the emphasis here is on what Birgitta receives from Christ from beyond her faculties, by pointing to the ways in which divinity accommodates itself to human faculties, Christ's responses to the monk implicitly emphasize the role of those very faculties—of Birgitta's imagination, for instance—in the production of the inspired text we are reading. Not that Birgitta's role in the composition of the text is even acknowledged; like the other texts discussed here so far, what is of interest is their link to divinity—God's role and not Birgitta's. At the same time, Christ's answers to the monk on the ladder, by validating Revelation's accommodation to human faculties, raise the issue of the participation of human faculties in divine communication. God speaks not only to, but also through Birgitta.

The last several of that book's thirteen revelations express something less defensive by describing her revelations in terms of spiritual pleasure or consolation. For example, in Revelation 11, Christ links Birgitta's reception of revelations to her turn to asceticism and study following the death of her husband,

whereby she developed "a taste for the dry olive tree, that is, for the words of the Gospels and the discourse of those learned men of mine."[58] (Searby gives "discourse of those learned men of mine" for the original text's *conuersacio doctorum meorum*, but the reference here seems to be specifically to Doctors of the Church rather than "learned men" in general). Christ describes Birgitta's revelations as a form of spiritual consolation or sweetness:

> And when the olive tree began to flow and the words of my revelations came down upon you in Spirit, somebody standing on the mountain cried out, saying: "By this drink thirst is slaked, the cold are warmed, the troubled are cheered, the infirm recover." I myself, God, am the one who cries out. My words, which you hear from me frequently in spiritual vision, are like a good drink satisfying to those who thirst for true love; second, they warm the cold; third, they cheer the troubled; fourth, they heal those who are weak in soul.[59]

In the final revelation, God the Father concludes the *Liber questionum* by referring to Birgitta's upcoming pilgrimage to the Holy Land and promising her both more revelations and more consolation: "Therefore whoever comes clean and with a good and perfect intention to these places will see and taste the sweetness and goodness of me, God. And when you come to these places I will show you more."[60] We might read this entire book as a projection of Birgitta's concerns about the inadequacy of her words to effectively express what has been revealed to her, but also as expressing a sense of spiritual consolation Birgitta received through the writing of her revelations as a form of union with God. God the Father's promise, at the end of the book, of future consolation and revelation can be read as confirming Birgitta's future mission as she moved from Sweden to Italy and the Holy Land. But if the book was in fact completed later in her life, as seems at least possible, it can be read as a reflection on her entire career as visionary author and on the very nature of the *Revelations* as revelatory writing.

58 Rev. v: rev.11.8.

59 Rev. v: rev.11.9–10.

60 Rev. v: rev.13.15.

5 Christ as Carpenter: Divine Inspiration and Human Imagination

Another well-known revelation makes Birgitta's role as author more explicit. This is a text that survives as number 49 in the *Revelaciones extravagantes*. Here Christ explains to Birgitta the relationship between divine inspiration and human imagination by way of a homely metaphor: he likens himself to a carpenter who takes wood and makes a beautiful image from it, but then hands it on to others so that they might make it more beautiful by adding "their own colors to it." The metaphor here—coloring the image carved by Christ the carpenter—seems mainly to mean verbal adornment (by elaboration or gloss), but Christ's words also refer clearly and specifically to books, and seem to gesture to the work of manuscript decoration: "So I God have cut my words from the divine forest, and placed them in your heart. Truly, my friends have gathered them into books according to the gifts given them and have colored and decorated them." He then commands Birgitta to give "the books of revelations of my words to my bishop the hermit"—a reference to the hermit and ex-bishop of Jaén, Alfonso—"that he might arrange [*conscribat*—literally, 'co-write'] them and elucidate the obscure things and hold to the catholic sense of my spirit."[61] As with the image Christ crafted from the wood, His inspiration is not given fully formed or complete. Christ explains that, like the Evangelists and Doctors of the Church, Birgitta must think over what has been revealed to her from God, work out its meaning, and devise the best ways to express it:

> Your heart is not always capable and enough on fire to express in writing that which you sense [or "perceive," *sentis*], but at a certain time you consider and reconsider them in your mind, and at another time write and rewrite them, until you arrive at the proper sense of my words. Just so my spirit used to ascend and descend with the evangelists and doctors of the church, so that at a certain time they would set down some things that had to be corrected, and another time things that had to be revised and corrected by others. And still others came later, who would take them apart with more subtlety, and explain their words more clearly.[62]

Christ here emphasizes the provisional, imperfect nature of any text purporting to be God's words. But he also stresses that the necessary process of interpretation and reinterpretation of revelation does not make the writings that result any less divinely inspired: "Nevertheless, it was through infusion, from

61 Extrav.: 49.4.

62 Extrav.: 49.6–7. Author's translation.

my spirit, that all of my evangelists had the words that they spoke and wrote."[63] The words of the Gospels are received from God and devised by their human authors. Birgitta's revelations are both God's words and Birgitta's.

If Birgitta's account of her vision of the *Regula Salvatoris* gives a vivid sense of the experience of receiving divine inspiration, this revelation seems to express what it meant for her to put into words what she received. This revelation might reflect her awareness late in her career of the circulation of her *Revelations* as a work of literature independent of the particular moments in which the individual revelations were issued, and indeed of Alfonso's role in their publication. In any case, Birgitta here directly acknowledges an aspiration to be an author—or rather co-author with Christ—by having her revelations "published" as illuminated manuscript books. As Barbara Newman has noted, Birgitta's revelation of Christ as Carpenter is a "commonsense" acknowledgement of the role played by human agency in the composition of visionary texts: "[it] leads us to wonder how many other visionaries would gladly have conceded, if they dared, that their own intelligence (and their editors) had cooperated with the divine Spirit to produce their books."[64] It is also important to note how Birgitta acknowledges cooperation with her confessor and followers. Her role as inspired author is diminished neither by her having received her words from God, nor by the contributions of Alfonso and others in the composition of the *Revelations*.

It is not surprising that this vision was omitted from the *Revelations*. The idea of Birgitta as an agent, with God, in the production of the texts offended against the demands of female sanctity mentioned already. And the attention this revelation draws to the role of Alfonso and others of her followers in the creation of the corpus was perhaps equally problematic. Both divine inspiration and the involvement of her followers also offend against modern notions of authors as solitary agents. But to return to a point made earlier in this essay, if Birgitta was another Moses, there was no reason that she should have had less to do with the authorship of the words of her texts than medieval authorities would have assumed that Moses did. The problem in the case of Birgitta was, again, that the legitimacy of her revelations was not a given, nor was her status as another Moses. But if one accepts that Birgitta was inspired, then Christ's words to Birgitta in the "carpenter" revelation fill in what is missing from Alfonso's and Birgitta's accounts of her reception of divine inspiration: the human author, responsible for putting into words wordless divine inspiration, the middle term between the Word and words.

63 Extrav.: 49.7.

64 Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'?," 40.

6 Conclusion

The moments in the *Revelations* discussed here suggest that Birgitta was aware that the revelatory genre provided her with a way to write about God—to say what in any other mode she probably would not have been allowed to say. But it would be a mistake to consider the revelatory form a mere genre that she employed strategically. Birgitta insists repeatedly that her words come from God—that they are, in some sense, God's words. To not take that claim seriously is to choose to ignore a commitment that was fundamental not only to her career as a holy woman and prophet, but also to what we might call—especially on the evidence of the revelation in *Extravagantes* 49—a self-consciously *literary* project. Birgitta's preoccupation with the divine source of her words throughout the *Revelations*, but above all in the several passages we have looked at here, can be understood as expressions of creative self-awareness. Indeed, the features of Birgitta's approach to texts that for Morris make her not a *litterata*, including her deference to God, are in fact the terms within which she composed her texts and that define her as an author. Rather than deprive her of authorial agency, Birgitta's insistence on the divine origin of her words offers essential insight into her self-understanding as an author.

To return to the idea that Birgitta's authorship was a problem, perhaps we take too literally or too much out of context the hagiographic comments that seem to make Birgitta something other than an author of her revelations. When Birgitta and her hagiographers expressed her passivity relative to God, they were emphasizing one side of her persona as prophet—the side that was most important for making the case for her sanctity and the legitimacy of her revelations—and not necessarily denying that in other respects she was far from passive. After all, Thomas Aquinas in his commentary on the Psalms wrote that "the tongue of man in Sacred Scripture is like the tongue of a child who says words that another provides,"[65] and yet proceeded to analyse the different *modi agendi*—what we might call literary styles—of the different psalms in terms that make it clear that he considered David a poet who chose

65 Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in psalmos Davidi*, in *Opera Omnia* (Parma: 1863; cited from http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/cpsoo.html): "Notandum autem, quod aliud est in Sacra Scriptura, et aliud in aliis scientiis. Nam aliae scientiae sunt per rationem humanam editae, haec autem Scriptura per instinctum inspirationis divinae, *2. Pet. 1. Non enim voluntate humana allata est Prophetia, sed Spiritu Sancto inspirati locuti sunt etc.* Et ideo lingua hominis se habet in Scriptura Sacra, sicut lingua pueri dicentis verba quae alius ministrat. *Psalm. 44. Lingua mea calamus etc. 2. Reg. 23. Spiritus Domini locutus est per me, et sermo eius per linguam meam.*"

how to express what he was inspired to write.[66] And to recall Newman's reference to the carpenter revelation's "commonsense" account of the participation of human agency in the production of Birgitta's revelations, one imagines that medieval hagiographers and their readers might also have possessed a certain amount of common sense! That Birgitta played a role in choosing the words through which to convey the meaning of what was revealed to her by God is, in fact, the only account that makes sense—even if, as Newman notes, the only way Birgitta could make this point was by expressing it through God's words in a revelation. The problem remains, for Birgitta's followers as well as for Birgitta herself, to explain the process by which God's inspiration becomes text—the relationship between the Word and words. Finally, it is important to note that for followers like Mathias and Alfonso, as well as for Birgitta in the texts we have discussed here, her privileged position as an inspired author is not merely a potential source of controversy, but also a source of interest and even fascination—what gave Birgitta's texts power and made them worth reading.

66 This is a complex topic, far beyond my abilities to deal with here. But consider, for example, one instance in Thomas's prologue to *Expositio in psalmos*, where he analyses the title of the Book of Psalms: "Et hinc sumitur ratio tituli qui est, Incipit liber hymnorum, seu soliloquiorum Propheta David de Christo. Hymnus est laus Dei cum cantico; canticum autem exultatio mentis de aeternis habita, prorumpens in vocem. Docet ergo laudare Deum cum exultatione. Soliloquium est collocutio hominis cum Deo singulariter, vel secum tantum, quia hoc convenit laudanti, et oranti." It is hard to make sense of this passage, and many others in Thomas's analysis of the Psalms, if it is assumed that David as author of the Psalms was merely copying a text that was given to him word for word. On the contrary, it is clear that Thomas assumes that David played a role in the composition of this scriptural text.

CHAPTER 2

Birgitta and the Bible

Anders Piltz

A close reading of St Birgitta's *Revelations* shows how deeply imbued she was with biblical language and biblical frames of thought.[1] Her confessor and spiritual advisor, Master Mathias of Linköping (d. *c.* 1350), probably *magister sacrae paginae*, was engaged in commenting on the Apocalypse of St John when Birgitta received her first "revelations" in Sweden (*c.* 1344).[2] My thesis is that this book and other biblical narratives provided Birgitta with a stage, a scenario, a set of typical scenes, actors, dialogues, and addressees. She identifies herself with the biblical Bride (Apoc. 22:17) and calls herself a *canale*, a "conduit" of the Holy Spirit.[3] The present study focuses on the intertextual links between the Latin Bible and Birgitta's text as well as on her relationship to scholastic theology. I argue that Birgitta identifies herself with biblical scenes and narratives and that, in her inspired moments, she enters that stage and, in the process, occasionally applies biblical narratives to contemporary persons and situations. The Bible helped her to structure and rationalize her intense mental energies. She thinks of herself both as a divinely inspired messenger of God's word in the biblical sense and, at the same time, as a human author.[4]

The facts underpinning these assertions were in part provided by Birgit Klockars in her magisterial study *Birgitta och böckerna* ("Birgitta and the Books") from 1966, in which she underlines the great frequency of biblical expressions, allusions, and images found in the *Revelations*.[5] In this chapter, I will try to complete Klockars's results while also venturing a theological

1 All translations from the Vulgate are my own.

2 Anders Piltz, "Mathias Ouidi (Övidsson)," in SBL, vol. 25: 248. For Master Mathias's comment on the Apocalypse, see Mathias of Linköping, *Exposicio super Apocalypsim*, ed. Ann-Marie Billing-Ottosson (Uppsala: 2003). This work is hereafter referred to as *Exposicio*.

3 Extrav.: 47.3. The last words are reminiscent of 1 Sam. 16:13, which states that the Spirit of the Lord remained with David from his anointing until his death.

4 On this specific subject, see also Chapter 1 by F. Thomas Luongo in the present volume.

5 Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna. En undersökning av den heliga Birgittas källor* (Stockholm: 1966).

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interpretation of Birgitta's consciousness of her own identity, that is, the basic elements of her self-image.[6]

1 Birgitta's Knowledge of the Bible

According to depositions in the canonization process, Birgitta, when still a married woman in Sweden, procured for herself a copy of the Bible in Swedish translation.[7] She read it over and over. From her arrival in Rome and onwards, she sometimes (*interdum*) recited the entire Psalter every day, and she always (*continue*) prayed the votive Offices of Our Lady, the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, and the Office of the deceased.[8] Birgitta thus acquired a considerable knowledge of Scripture both in Swedish and in Latin. When settled in Rome in 1349, she embarked upon a more systematic study of Latin. Her familiarity with the Bible was indeed exceptional for a medieval laywoman. Birgitta acquired the proficiency necessary to understand and express herself passably in Latin.[9] She is reported to have checked personally the accuracy of the Latin translations of her Swedish original texts.[10]

2 Mathias and the Apocalypse of St John

The author of the Apocalypse ("John," 1:1) claims that he saw his visions while in a state of ecstasy (*fui in spiritu*, 1:10). A voice, speaking from behind, ordered him to write down what he saw. The voice "was like the roar of many waters" and it belonged to "the Son of Man," Jesus Christ, also called the Lamb, or the King of Kings, and (implicitly) Judge and Bridegroom. In a series of visions he delivers explanations of human history and words of reprobation and consolation. The scenery comprises a nondescript throne, where God himself is seated. On his right-hand side are the Lamb, the twenty-four Elders, and four

6 I have published two preliminary studies on this subject in Swedish, see Anders Piltz, "Uppenbarelserna och Uppenbarelsen. Birgittas förhållande till bibeln," in *Birgitta, hendes værk og hendes klostre i Norden,* ed. Tore Nyberg (Odense: 1991), 447–69; Anders Piltz, "Inspiration, vision, profetia. Birgitta och teorierna om uppenbarelsen," in *Heliga Birgitta, budskapet och förebilden. Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vadstena 3–7 oktober 1991*, eds. Alf Härdelin and Mereth Lindgren (Stockholm: 1993), 67–88.

7 AP, 78.

8 AP, 13; these offices consist mostly of psalms from the Psalter.

9 AP, 95, 545, and 633.

10 AP, 84. On Birgitta's education in general, see Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna*, 1–28.

living creatures, by ecclesiastical tradition identified with the four evangelists, and also all the saints, among whom the martyrs have a prominent place. The whole human race in heaven, on earth, and below the earth is present (5:3). Christ himself, an angel, and one of the Elders speak with John. The characters have a wealth of attributes (such as crowns borne by both the evil and the just), and numerous images pass in review. The author has a penchant for numerological speculation and arranges the scenes accordingly.

The Apocalypse of John was intended to boost the primitive Christians, who were facing the terror unleashed against them by the Roman empire in the 60s of the first century. The emperor, Nero, albeit never mentioned by name, is understood as the very personification of evil. No one but the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, has the power to break the seven seals (5:1), that is, to give the authoritative explanation of the mysteries of human history.

Conversing with Master Mathias must have initiated the highly receptive and intelligent Birgitta into the biblical world more thoroughly than private studies could ever have done. The expository principles (e.g. the "four senses" of Scripture) cannot have been unknown to her. Mathias discussed with her the authorship of the Apocalypse, disputed even in the Middle Ages, and the question of when Antichrist was likely to appear.[11]

Birgitta's inner universe, easily accessible to her at any moment, was indeed often staged like the Apocalypse. History evolves before the Throne of God and the heavenly Lamb. The incalculable and obscure events were read in the light of Christ's death and resurrection.

Judging from his commentary on the Apocalypse, Mathias had lesser ambitions than most other practitioners of the trade to disambiguate the developments of history in detail.[12] His intention was to apply the apocalyptic symbols to the ecclesiastical and political situation of the 14th century from a moral perspective. The seven seals (Chs. 5–8) symbolized, to Mathias, seven kinds of suffering: the affliction of the just; the success of the evil; heresies; false brethren; hypocrites; the fact that evildoers evade their punishment; and that

11 Rev. VI: 89. Anders Piltz, "Mathias of Sweden in his Theological Context: A Preliminary Survey," in *The Editing of Theological and Philosophical Texts from the Middle Ages*, ed. Monika Asztalos (Stockholm: 1986), 137–60. For the discussion about when and where Antichrist was to be born, see Marjorie Reeves, "The Development of Apocalyptic Thought: Medieval Attitudes," in *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature*, eds. C.A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (Manchester: 1984), 53. On the influence of Joachim of Fiore in general, see Marjorie Reeves, "The Originality and Influence of Joachim of Fiore," *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion* 36 (1980): 269–316.

12 Mathias of Linköping, *Exposicio*.

not even the just are irreproachable. The seven trumpets (Chs. 8–9) represent the sevenfold corruption of the Church. The grasshoppers and the scorpions (Ch. 9) are the evil princes on earth. But Christ watches over his Church and will assist it in her last days. A divinely ordained timetable is operative: the Apocalypse of St John, for the most part a closed book, will in the last days, which were approaching rapidly, be explained completely by Christ himself.[13]

3 Birgitta and the Apocalypse

Everything in this apocalyptic world is highly suggestive of the *Revelations* of Birgitta. A quick look in the source apparatus of the Apocalypse of John proves that most of the Greek text alludes to images, concepts, and idioms from the Old Testament. Just as the Apocalypse is imbued with the Old Testament, so too are the *Revelations* of Birgitta replete with biblical narratives and idioms. The Virgin Mary is not mentioned explicitly in the Apocalypse, but to Birgitta, well versed in the liturgy, Mary's place was obvious: on the right-hand side of Christ, the celestial Lamb, who is on the right-hand side of God (Ps. 109:2, Matt. 22:44, and many times in the New Testament; the queen in Ps. 44:10 was identified with Mary in liturgy, teaching, and preaching).

The scroll (Apoc. 5:1) of human history is unfolded, evil and corruption triumph in the world, God threatens and entreats humanity through his friends, the prophets. Birgitta was not content to be a bystander in this drama; she became a member of the cast. It is easy to imagine Birgitta as an exalted reader of Scripture, day and night repeating its words (Ps. 1:2), entering into the text and becoming an actor in it, indeed its protagonist. She *was* the Bride of whom John speaks, and like John, she was the addressee of Jesus' commission: "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings" (Apoc. 10:11). She thinks that she is one of the prophets of whom the celestial voices speak (Apoc. 11:18). The Bride with whom she identifies is not the passive recipient *sponsa* of traditional bridal mysticism, but rather the Bride of the Apocalypse: "And the Spirit and the Bride say: Come! And let the one who hears say: Come! And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wants it take the water of life free of charge" (Apoc. 22:17).

Given this pattern, the contemporary developments yielded material for any number of prophecies. Whatever had happened in the Old Testament was but a shadow of what was to follow in the New, and what happened to Jesus in Galilee and Judaea was the model of what would happen to his followers. Narratives, events, and parables in the Old Testament and in the Gospels were

13 Mathias of Linköping, *Exposicio*, VI: 1–6; X: 107–8.

like *tableaux vivants* reenacted in Birgitta's times. The words of the prophets and Jesus were more topical than ever. They must be repeated and applied to ever-changing situations: even the words of the Gospels were not fulfilled immediately.[14]

The living God who spoke and acted in Scripture had not withdrawn from history and become petrified in a text. Birgitta is like Moses, to whom God spoke from the burning bush.[15] Christ speaks now to the world, not in a visible shape, but in Birgitta. Her soul and conscience are with him and in him.[16] Birgitta has an even more important task than the parents of John the Baptist. An angel spoke to them; God himself converses with Birgitta. The effects of the Incarnation were to be enhanced and become efficient, even in Sweden. Jesus is the Word proceeding from the mouth of God and from which all things live and subsist.[17]

Moreover, Birgitta is called a "flask" (*vas*) to be filled and drained as it pleases God, who will show her where to go and what to say.[18] The revelations were not given to Birgitta for her own sake but for the fosterage and salvation of humanity. The scope was to reveal God's love, to make men convert and acknowledge their Creator, whom they had forgotten.[19] Birgitta thus ascribes to herself an importance as fundamental as that of the prophets, the apostles, and the Blessed Virgin. What they had been while on earth, Birgitta was to her contemporaries. Master Mathias, in his expert opinion expressed in *Stupor et mirabilia* (the preface of the *Revelations*), presents Birgitta antithetically as the completion, if not the outdoing, of God's prior actions in history: his recent apparition in an unlearned woman is even more stupendous than when he appeared in the flesh. In the Incarnation, a mortal man (Jesus) spoke to mortal men. In Birgitta, Christ, living forever, speaks to mortal men in order to make them immortal.[20]

4 Influences from Joachim of Fiore?

Hjalmar Sundén assumed that the tenets of the Calabrian abbot Joachim of Fiore (d. 1202), who theorized about the dawn of three consecutive ages in human history (of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit), had inspired Birgitta

14 Rev. VIII: 48.238.
15 Rev. II: 10.3.
16 Rev. II: 13.6.
17 Rev. VIII: 48.235–237.
18 Rev. IV: 77.15–16. Cf. Ex. 47. The flask image was probably inspired by Acts 9:15.
19 Rev. II: 15.35.
20 Prol. M.: 21–23.

and Mathias too during the first period of her career as a visionary.[21] If so, Birgitta would, in her own eyes, have initiated the Age of the Spirit. Birgitta (in Rev. VI: 67) actually speaks of the three ages of the world. Moreover, according to Sundén, Mathias' prologue *Stupor and mirabilia* presupposes not only one *kairos* (a single momentous turning point in salvation history), as orthodox Christianity has it, but two: one through Christ, and the other through Birgitta. This would be a sensational claim, stretching credulity and hardly conducive to a successful canonization process. In my opinion, this is an overinterpretation of Mathias' enthusiastic hyperboles. Mathias indeed equals Birgitta's *Revelations* with the "small still voice" in which God, after not having appeared in the storm, the earthquake, and the fire, revealed himself to Elijah on Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19; in the New English Bible "soft whisper").[22] Such a parallel does not justify the assumption of a schematic system of historical periods in Birgitta's universe, and no such periodization appears in Mathias' commentary on the Apocalypse, the natural place to discuss the Joachimite model. To Mathias, there were two fundamental epochs: the Old and the New Dispensation. The divine pedagogy began with what was robust and simple, later proceeding to a more sophisticated and spiritual form: from precepts and prohibitions to interiorized ethos. This process was still going on, according to Mathias, and it should be noted that the *humiles et mansueti* ("the humble and meek") among his contemporaries were in fact listening to the voice of Jesus. The plural seems to imply that people other than Birgitta were also the instruments of his message.[23]

Mathias underlines insistently that Birgitta's *Revelations* did not contain anything but the faith proclaimed by Christ. They only make God's mercy more apparent: neither subtracting nor adding anything to the truth that is in Christ, they emphasize his mercy.[24] Nor does the last book of the Bible supply any otherwise unknown information: it merely elucidates and applies what is already common knowledge to the actual situation of the church.[25]

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21 Hjalmar Sundén, *Den heliga Birgitta. Ormungens dotter som blev Kristi brud* (Stockholm: 1973), 11–17; concerning Joachim and his impact, see Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: 1969); Henri de Lubac, *La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore*, 2 vols (Paris: 1979–81). Mathias, in his *Exposicio* (I: 112 and *passim*), speaks of seven *status* of the Church in another sense than the three *status* of Joachim: the age of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, respectively.

22 Prol. M.: 3.

23 Prol. M.: 1.

24 Prol. M.: 28.

25 Håkan Ulfgard, "Exégèse à la fin des temps dans la Suède médiévale. Spiritualité et actualité dans *l'Exposicio super Apocalypsim* de Mathias de Linköping," in *Le Jour de Dieu/Der*

Alfonso of Jaén (d. 1389), the Spanish ex-bishop and confessor of Birgitta, whom she entrusted with the editing of the *Revelations*, adopted an attitude different from that of Mathias. In his prologue to the last book of the corpus, he stressed the surplus information in Birgitta as evidence that she was an authentic prophet.[26] The *Revelations* do in fact contain things that materially increase our knowledge about the lives of Christ and Mary. But this was by no means sensational. In the Bible and in the Lives of the Saints, Alfonso claims, several women famous for their prophetical inspiration are commended: Anna, daughter of Phanuel; Elisabeth; Lucia; the Tiburtine and the Erythraean Sibyls; "and many others."[27] (The Sibyls were recognized by pagans and Christians alike as a class of prophetic females.) Prophecy had not ceased with the last line of the New Testament. But the function of Birgitta was not to mark a new epoch of the New Dispensation; she was, according to Alfonso, the Bride of Christ—a symbol and representative of every serious Christian.

5 What Is Prophecy?

Prophecy exists in many religions, but most markedly so in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Critical prophecy is part of a vital religious community and presupposes, dialectically, the existence of an institution to criticize. Without prophecy, religion is reduced to routine. Without institution, prophecy becomes a wandering specter with no significant social consequences. A prophet is deeply rooted in tradition and criticizes it radically on its own premises while also drawing on its own sources of inspiration. A prophet is deeply conscious of his or her divine vocation: to be the chosen among many, to act under compulsion from above. If society and religion live in an intimate relationship, prophecy will inevitably mean social criticism. Prophets do not convey common wisdom or teach spiritual techniques; they are not primarily endowed with clairvoyance and do not provide glimpses of the future, nor are they spokespersons of a numinous reality in general. The prophet, invested with religious authority, speaks in God's name and evaluates a situation so as to give advice on how

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Tag Gottes. 5. Symposium Strasbourg, Tübingen, Uppsala 11.-13. September 2006 in Uppsala, eds. Anders Hultgård and Stig Norin (Tübingen: 2009), 213–30.

26 In his discussion of the authenticity of visionaries and visions, Alfonso uses the expressions *propheta*, *prophetissa*, and *spiritus prophecie*, see ES: 1.21–26. Arne Jönsson (ed.), *Alfonso of Jaén. His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi* (Lund: 1989), 120–22. For a discussion of the prologue, *Epistola solitarii ad reges*, see also Chapter 1 in the present volume.

27 ES: 1.26.

to act—in other words, s/he interprets history. God freely chooses whom to send as a messenger, and sometimes He lets prophecy become rare, or cease altogether (1 Sam. 3:1). The prophet is the ambassador of God and free to formulate the message to the best of his or her ability, according to circumstances and addressees. The message is phrased in stark colors, warning that the road chosen will end in disaster, unless another course is taken before it is too late. The mission is to show no understanding of human frailty and fallibility, to be inflexible, and to seek no compromises. If the language is aggressive, the aggression is in the nature of things and in the interest of the listeners, to correct the disorder of things while it is still possible. Prophecy is benevolent, not malicious: it is a well-meaning (not to be taken ironically!) entreaty directed to persons who ought to know better but through slackness have forgotten their first love and become lukewarm and negligent. Nothing prevents a prophet from being a visionary and an organizer at the same time. Through a paradoxical yet necessary development, prophecy itself becomes part of the institution, just as revolution becomes part of an institutionalized political program. It has to preserve the dialectic relation to institutions in order not to fade away and become an insignificant episode.[28] According to this standard, Birgitta was a prophet, and it is my thesis that she thought of herself exactly as such even if she did not apply that designation to herself, since the term, in her milieu, was understood primarily as somebody making predictions about the future.[29] But no other term can better describe Birgitta's self-image, her achievement, and her impact.

Johannes Lindblom was the first scholar to point at the parallels between the Old Testament prophets and later visionaries, especially Birgitta, as the phenomena of the receptive state are concerned. One could add one more similarity: the Bible, combined with her day-to-day experience, has provided Birgitta with the very *form* of her "revelations." Even inspiration needs material to work with. Religious experience always interacts with a given tradition. For

28 Karl Rahner, "Prophetismus," in *Herders theologisches Taschenlexikon* (Freiburg i. B.: 1972–73), 6 and 82–86.

29 For Mathias, "prophetism" seems to be a biblical (i.e. historical) concept, see Piltz, "Inspiration," n. 26, with some fragmentary examples adduced from his *Alphabetum distinccionum*, and Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: 2001), 36, n. 5. Some fairly coherent parts of these *Alphabetum* are edited in Anders Piltz (ed.), "Mathiæ canonici Lincopensis Alphabeti distinccionum sive Concordanciarum fragmenta selecta," in *Symbolæ Septentrionales. Latin Studies Presented to Jan Öberg*, eds. Monika Asztalos and Claes Gejrot (Stockholm: 1995), 137–71, hereafter *Alphabetum*.

Birgitta (as for other pious people in other contexts), the Bible was *the* frame of reference and *the* means of understanding the human condition.[30]

We can presume that Birgitta could easily transport herself to different states of mind, ranging from deep meditation to various degrees of hypnagogic concentration, a state on the border between dreaming and wakefulness. There is a hint of this process on the simplest level in the *Revelaciones extravagantes* (25–26), where Christ asks: "What did you read today in your book?" Birgitta answers that she had read about the fall of Jericho. Then the spirit speaking to her continues with a commentary on the biblical narrative (Joshua, Ch. 6) and applies it to the planned monastery of Vadstena, where the buildings placed at its disposal by King Magnus Eriksson had been destroyed by "the enemies of God."[31] Birgitta's frustration, since the construction of the monastery had been delayed, is directed against the king, who did not care enough about her directions and points of view. In her *Revelations,* Birgitta thus assumes the privilege to pass judgement on things great and small, just as the biblical prophets had done. She could invoke the highest precedents.

Below, I will emphasize, without making any claims to completeness, some typical cases of structural similarity with the biblical prophets, and I will discuss the possible role played by the scholastic theories on inspiration and the different kinds of visionaries and visions for Birgitta.

6 The Old Testament Prophets

In the Old Testament, the prophets (Hebr. *nevi'im*, "spokespersons") warrant the authentic interpretation of God's will. They work outside, or at least independently of, the religious institutions. The prophet chastises infidelity towards the covenant, religious hypocrisy, or a cult deprived of spiritual substance and devoid of a corresponding morality. Towards the end of the scriptural prophetic period, apocalypse prevails; the sufferings of the last days and the bliss of the saved few are depicted in strong colors. Mostly, a prophecy is provoked by a concrete historical situation and does not aim at stating timeless truths. The prophet, however, aware of his or her insufficiency, acts on behalf of God. Isaiah beheld the untamed glory of God in the Temple. He felt deeply unworthy, but his lips were cleansed by one of the seraphs with a live coal (Ch. 6). Jeremiah heard that he was chosen from his mother's womb and

30 Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: 1963), 18–26.

31 For Vadstena Abbey, see Chapter 5 by Birgitta Fritz in the present volume.

singled out for an unpleasant task (Ch. 1). Ezekiel had a surreal vision and heard the voice of the Lord taking command over him (Chs. 1–2).

The prophetic message in the Old Testament usually begins with the formula "Hear the word of the Lord," which serves as the equivalent of a signature in modern documents. The historical origin of such prophetic statements was "inspired" oracles as replies to acute questions. Among such prophecies recorded in the Bible, reproof prevails, usually in the form of a charge and the pronouncement of a verdict, a rhetorical strategy possibly originating in the trial procedure. There were three kinds of addressees: individual persons (mostly kings or princes), the entire people, or certain foreign peoples. The promises of success are scarce; prophets normally opposed that kind of prophecy. There is also the genre of exhortation, open to repentance and a happy ending. Such prophecies were usually short and cursory ("repent, perhaps God will relent and change his mind," Jonah 3:9, Joel 2:14). Ecstatically vibrant visions alternate with clear interpretations. The prophets sometimes themselves ensured that their words were consigned to writing; in other cases, their disciples do so. The message was considered a living word, going beyond the actual situation, later rephrased according to other circumstances.

Isaiah rebukes arrogance and lack of faith, social injustice, and a liturgy distorted into an empty spectacle. Jeremiah addresses kings, princes, priests, and people and urges the interiorization of the law. Ezekiel, an ecstatic surrealist, poet, and organizer, as well as a sober dogmatist with a keen interest in ritual and the architecture of the planned temple, raves against the shepherds of the people, who exploit their flock. Hosea describes his people as the promiscuous wife of God, her faithful husband. Joel proceeds from the liturgy, explaining its purpose. Amos passes verdicts, presented with great rhetorical skill; after having captured the benevolence of his audience with devastating criticism of their neighbors, he suddenly turns the very same weapons against his own people. Obadiah focuses on imminent judgment. The book of Jonah is a novel, stressing God's mercy towards all, not only the Jews. Micah summarizes all the other prophets: God demands justice, love, humility, nothing else. Nahum is the unsurpassed poet, with brilliant imagery and hectic rhythms. Toward the end of the prophetical era, in Zecharia, and even more so in Daniel, there is a shift towards apocalyptic visions; the future prospect of salvation is contrasted with the present indolence and despair.[32]

32 Bruce Vawter, "Introduction to prophetic literature," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, and Roland E. Murphy (London: 1990), 186–200.

7 Prophecy in the New Testament

The Greek noun *pro-phêtês* is attested as early as in Pindar, meaning "one who speaks" (for a god and interprets his will to man). In the New Testament, several men and women are called prophets, above all John the Baptist. But even Jesus is called a prophet (the true Prophet, alluding to Deut. 18:15), especially in the Gospel of John and in Acts.[33] In the primitive Church, charismatic preachers could be styled prophets and enjoyed a respected standing, as did visionaries endowed with supernatural perspicacity. The author of the Apocalypse was clearly a prophet in that sense.

Prophecy, according to Paul, is a gift more precious than speaking in tongues, which is of little value except to those who practice it: "Those who prophesy speak to other people for their building up and encouragement and consolation" (1 Cor. 14:3). A prophet is not delirious but speaks lucidly, as an instruction to the Church. Paul himself wanted to convey revelation (*apokálypsis/revelatio*), knowledge (*gnôsis/scientia*), prophecy (*profêteia/prophetia*), and instruction (*didachê/doctrina*). Prophecy reveals and calls to account. It infallibly exposes what is going on within a person. In the Corinthian church, revelations, too, were welcome. If someone received such a revelation while someone else was speaking, the speaker should be interrupted. Yet even prophecy is something fragmentary here on earth, and it will come to an end. It provides a dark, dim, and enigmatic picture, as did a mirror in Paul's times. The real things will finally be seen as they are, in full lucidity, face to face. Since there are also false prophets, the discretion of spirits is a specific, indispensable grace (1 Cor. 12–14).

Prophecy was obviously an activity practiced in full awareness and not in ecstasy. It seems to be a form of increased consciousness, where intuition becomes certitude and conviction. Paul himself had experienced ecstasy (2 Cor. 12): "I know a person," he says, in the third person of modesty, "who was caught up to the third heaven, into Paradise, whether in the body or out of the body, God knows, and heard things that no mortal can or should repeat (*arrêta rhêmata*/*arcana verba*)." He had received overwhelming visions and revelations of the Lord (*optasias kai apokalypseis tou Kyriou/visiones et revelationes Domini*).

33 Rev. 1: 1.13.

8 Prophecy in the Scholastic Tradition

Prophecy, as a rhetorical genre, continued in the post-apostolic era, but prophets were increasingly associated with heresy and therefore considered suspect. The Church Fathers use the concept *prophêtês/propheta* almost exclusively to refer to biblical prophets and about predictions of the future. It was successively understood as meaning "one who foretells," with another function of the prefix *pro-*.[34] The Christians wanted to prove how Christ had been foretold in the Old Testament prophecies. The real criterion of a true prophet was, according to Origen, Irenaeus, John Chrysostom, and Cassiodorus, that the words of the prophets could be verified in the life of Christ. In the 6th century, Cassiodorus provided a definition of prophecy which was later to become part of the *Glossa ordinaria*: "Prophecy is the divine breath (inspiration) that foretells events through somebody's acts or words with unwavering truth."[35] (In the Middle Ages, the claims of Mohammed to be a prophet were refuted because he had never foretold anything that had later come true.)

In the scholastic treatment of prophecy, even Arabic and Jewish sources were incorporated. Avicenna (Ibn-Sina, d. 1037) considered prophecy as the fantasy of highly intelligent persons: the most elevated truths are expressed through images and words. Moses Maimonides, perhaps the greatest Jewish intellectual of the Middle Ages (d. 1204 in Cairo), taught that everybody could become a prophet through psychophysical training. Some persons are more apt to learn than others, but such a process can be blocked by desires and worries. Various Latin theologians developed the Pauline doctrine; what is the "mirror"—the essence of God, or something else?[36]

It is worthwhile to find out in some detail what the most famous of the medieval theologians, Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), thought on this matter. In this case, there was in fact a Swedish eyewitness, Thomas's fellow Dominican Peter of Dacia (d. 1289 in Visby, Gotland). Peter had studied in Paris in 1268, when

34 Erich Fascher, ΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ. *Eine sprach- und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Berlin: 1927).

35 "[P]rophetia est aspiratio (varia lectio: inspiratio) divina, quae euentus rerum aut per facta aut per dicta quorundam immobili veritate pronuntiat," Cassiodorus, *Expositio psalmorum*, CCSL 97, praef. This preface, slightly abbreviated, was part of the *Glossa ordinaria* and inserted before the book of Psalms, and it admits that understanding and interpreting the Bible can be called a prophetic task: "Non sunt autem illi a munere prophetie alieni, quibus data est facultas intelligendi vel interpretandi scripturas," *Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria* (ed. princeps Strasbourg 1480/81; repr. Turnhout: 1992), 457.

36 Reinhold Glei and Ulrich Dierse, "Prophetie," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Basel: 1971–2007), vol. 7: 1473–81.

Thomas was director of studies at the theological faculty for a second term. Peter had a personal interest in the problems of prophecy. One year before, he had met the visionary beguine Christina of Stommeln outside Cologne. Sometime after 1270, Peter wrote a highly theoretical treatise about the visionary ability given to the chosen few. He claims that his information on divine prophecy and *raptus* comes from Thomas Aquinas. *Raptus* is an intense activity occurring within a person who has rid himself of the senses and forgotten hunger, thirst, emotions, and reasoning, devoting himself to inner contemplation and its sweetness.[37]

Thomas Aquinas discusses prophecy in his *Summa theologiae*, II-II, questions 170–74. The subsequent question 175 is devoted to *raptus*. The doctrines of immediate interest here are the following: prophecy does not satisfy general curiosity; it always concerns faith and morality. It presupposes divine inspiration and conveys information not accessible to ordinary human inquiry. Fantasy and intelligence may dispose a person to become a prophet but are not in themselves sufficient causes. Prophecy perfects intelligence. That the prophet can foretell the future is explained by the fact that he or she beholds the "mirror of eternity." This means that one looks into the foreknowledge of God (while we live within a continuous temporal development, God sees all moments, past, present, and future, in one single and eternal Now).[38] Visions might be inspired directly by God, but they are often residues of personal experiences, which express a deeper truth by means of the lucidity of prophecy. Reminiscences of previous events, as well as the products of fantasy, and the whole throng of images and sounds within, can become letters, as it were, carrying a more profound meaning. One single letter has no meaning of its own. It only signifies together with other letters. The gift of prophecy consists of the capability to read the message of this parade of images, to see its significance, and to form a judgement about past, present, and future developments, combined with a moral appeal or some advice on what to opt for and how to act in an ambiguous situation. Thomas speaks of the prophetic revelation conveyed with angels as intermediaries (*prophetica revelatio, quae fit ministerio angelorum*). Receiving a revelation is, according to this teaching, the same as receiving the gift of prophecy.[39]

Prophecy is not delirium, then, but an activity engaging the intellect on the highest and most intense level. The prophet is an imperfect instrument of the

37 Monika Asztalos (ed.), *Petrus de Dacia, De gratia naturam ditante sive de virtutibus Christinae Stumbelensis* (Stockholm: 1982), 159–70.

38 This divine simultaneity is stressed in Rev. VIII: 48.234.

39 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 172, a. 2 ad 1.

Holy Spirit, though not fully aware of the content or intention of what he or she conveys in words or deeds. The comminatory prophecy does not always come true; it may have been a warning of what will happen unless something is done, preferably the conversion of sinners. If it is done, the chain of causes described will be eliminated or altered for the better.

In the Old Testament, still according to Thomas, one must make a distinction between prophets proper, those who have the office of prophecy and who speak on behalf of the Lord (with the phrase of legitimacy: "Thus speaks the Lord"), and other authors, who speak in their own name about things which are not inaccessible to reason, although such prophesying takes place under divine inspiration. The Acts of the Apostles mentions one prophet, Agabos, and the evangelist Philip, who had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy, which proves that the grace of prophecy can be given to women, just as it was bestowed on Deborah and Hulda in the Old Testament. Thomas adds that John wrote a prophetic book about the end of the Church, and in all eras there have been persons graced with the spirit of prophecy, not for the declaration of any new doctrine of faith but for the "direction of human acts."[40] Thus, prophecy was not defined once and for all, according to Thomas Aquinas, nor was it something restricted to or completed in the biblical texts.

9 Visions

Visions were part of the New Testament Gospels from the start. Joseph received revelations in his dreams (Matt. 1:20ff, 2:13, 2:19, and 2:22). Two magnificent scenes might be called verbal icons, depicting visions: the baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9–11, with parallels), and its counterpart, the transfiguration on the mount (Mark 9:1–11, with parallels). Luke (9:30), as the only evangelist, states that the disciples, after having wakened from a deep sleep, saw *and* heard Jesus converse with Moses and Elias about his death. According to Mark, having resumed the normal use of their mental faculties, they looked around and noticed that there was nobody there but Jesus. This account exhibits some characteristics of ecstasy:[41] loss of relation to reality (Peter did not know what he said), loss of sensual impressions (the disciples regain normal sight after a while), visions seen and words spoken, the overpowering presence of a supernatural force, and command of the self lost. Jesus himself calls what happened a vision (*horama/visio*, Matt. 17:9). In the early Church the dying Stephen,

40 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, 174, q. 6 ad 3.

41 "Ekstase," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* III (Freiburg i. B.), cols 573–575.

"filled with the Holy Spirit," saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at His right hand (Acts 7:55f). In a later development, Peter received a vision, and it is stated explicitly that he fell into a trance (*ekstasis/mentis excessus*, Acts 10:10ff). We have already mentioned Paul's ecstasy. The Apocalypse of John is nothing but a series of visions told by a person claiming to have been under the influence of the Spirit (Apoc. 1:10).

The most influential among the Latin Fathers, Augustine, makes a threefold distinction: a vision is either sensual (*visio corporalis*), imaginary (*visio imaginaria*), or verbal/abstract (*visio intellectualis*).[42]

Peter Dinzelbacher has listed 173 visions in medieval literature, from one Eugendus in the 6th century to Camilla Battista of Varano, who died in 1527.[43] More than seventy of these texts originate from women. No other literary genre has so many female representatives as that of visionary literature. This female visionary culture culminates in the High and Late Middle Ages. Karl Rahner distinguishes between mystical and political visions. The purpose of the mystical vision is the sanctification of the visionary, whereas a prophetic vision commissions the recipient to instruct, warn, urge, and/or foretell something, with a message directed to the world and to the church.[44] Birgitta assuredly received visions of a contemplative nature, but her main issue was the prophetic, or even the political, message. With the exception of Catherine of Siena, who was in some way influenced by her, there is no one who fits the definition of a prophet as well as the Swedish saint.[45]

10 Master Mathias on Prophecy and Revelation

In his concordance to the Bible (*Alphabetum distinccionum* or *Concordancie super totam Bibliam*), Master Mathias of Linköping included the entries *prophetia*, *revelacio*, and *visio*, the last two of which are not preserved.[46] Visions are, however, treated under the entry *inuisibilis*: nobody has ever seen God (John 1:18). Characters in the Bible who "saw God" saw Him by means of created and mutable things, symbols chosen and adapted for the purpose. God can

42 Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 12, 9; CSEL 28:1, 381. Mathias, in his *Exposicio* (I: 111–22), discusses these three types of vision and states in the Apocalypse.

43 Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: 1981).

44 Karl Rahner, *Visionen und Prophezeiungen* (Innsbruck: 1952), 21.

45 For a comparison between Birgitta and the most renowned female visionaries, see Piltz, "Inspiration," 73–74.

46 Mathias of Linköping, *Alphabetum*.

be seen anywhere and anytime, not as He really is but in the shape in which He chooses to show Himself in. Only in heaven will He show himself as He is.[47]

According to Mathias, the gift of *reuelacio* can be bestowed on humans at any time. A paragraph in the first chapter of his commentary on the Apocalypse discusses the mental conditions for receiving divine revelation (*que requiruntur in mente humana ad diuinam reuelacionem obtinendam*): The illumination of grace, burning love, the reading of and listening to the "law of God" (the Bible), active virtues, the seven gifts of the Spirit, and internal peace.[48] In itself, the human spirit is immersed in "the flesh." Only through self-discipline can it free itself from the conditions of the flesh and be elevated to the conditions of the spirit. In such an exceptional state of mind, it can see the depths of God and be initiated into divine secrets. This elevation is brought about through the mediation of an angel (*ministerio angelici spiritus*).[49]

But such a grace, Mathias continues, requires the recipient to possess a solid character, to have experienced crises (*debet esse tribulacione exercitatus*), to have perseverance, to have internal detachment from the urges of the flesh, to be independent of other people's praise, to have zeal for the law of God, to be fully absorbed by the spirit (i.e. unhampered by the senses; thus, an extracorporeal sensation), and, finally, to be chosen from above exclusively for the task in question.[50] Mathias reproduces the Augustinian doctrine of the three forms of visions (corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual). The author of Apocalypse was, according to Mathias, graced with a spiritual vision "that comprehends the truth of invisible things through images of visible things" (*que in rerum visibilium imaginibus rerum inuisibilium veritatem comprehendit*).[51] A preacher is required to be stable in good works, practice daily contemplation, understand the profundity of spiritual things by being acquainted with (the biblical)

47 Mathias of Linköping, *Alphabetum*, "Inuisibilis," in Stockholm, Kammararkivet, Landskapsh., Östergötl. 1572, n. 20, Räkenskaper: "To humans, God is invisible. The visions bestowed on our fathers took place through the changeable Creation, subject to the unchangeable God, not as real events but as representations, and according to the appropriate causal and temporal order. God is beheld when He wishes to and as He wishes to and <not> as He is, but in the shape it pleases Him to choose. In future they will see Him as He is." "Ab hominibus est Deus inuisibilis. Visiones autem ille exhibite patribus per creaturam commutabilem Deo incommutabili subditam facte sunt, non proprie sicut sunt, set significatiue, sicut rerum causis et temporibus oportuit. Videtur enim Deus cum wlt, et sicut wlt, <non> sicut est set quali specie wlt apparere; in futuro autem videbunt eum sicut est."

48 Mathias of Linköping, *Exposicio*, I: 44–50.

49 Mathias of Linköping, *Exposicio*, I: 88–95.

50 Mathias of Linköping, *Exposicio*, I: 101–10.

51 Mathias of Linköping, *Exposicio*, I: 101–10.

symbols, and lead a quiet and humble life in private; he must not be arrogant, he must be deeply initiated into the truth and have a fervent fear of and love for God. His contribution is to give a lucid interpretation of Scripture.[52]

Such was the theory of the revelatory state of mind, formulated by the confessor of Birgitta at the time when she received her first revelations in Sweden. In his prologue (*Stupor et mirabilia*) to the *Revelations*, Mathias never calls Birgitta a prophet, but speaks of her experiences in terms of *apparicio* and *reuelacio*. The scholastic understanding of *prophetia*, applied exclusively to persons and actions in the Bible, might have been an obstacle to styling her as a prophet.[53]

11 Biblical Intertexts

Numerous linguistic correspondences between the biblical texts and Birgitta's *Revelations* can be adduced in support of the thesis that she identified herself with a number of biblical persons. Her language is colored with biblical idioms. The fact that the *Revelations* was translated into Latin and edited by priests might have enhanced this feature but cannot possibly have created it.[54]

The very first chapter in Book I, a so-called audition that was reported to have taken place after the death of Birgitta's husband (*c.* 1344), is a case in point. Christ speaks to Birgitta: "[Y]ou, my daughter, whom I have chosen for myself and with whom I speak in spirit … I am the true prophet. If you believe my words and fulfill them, oil and joy and exultation will never fail you for all eternity."[55] The imagery is inspired by the narrative of the prophet Elijah visiting the widow of Zarephath during a period of severe famine and drought (1 Kings 17). Close to death, she unwillingly offers her last resources to the man of God. He rewards her with the wondrous promise that oil and flour will never

52 Mathias of Linköping, *Alphabetum*, "Predicator," Stockholm, Kammararkivet, Landskapsh., Västmanland 1569, n. 2 A, Räkenskap f. Åkerbo, etc.

53 For a further discussion of Birgitta's agency and the portrayal of her as a passive recipient of the divine word, see Chapter 1 in the present volume.

54 As Bridget Morris argues (in "Labyrinths of the Urtext," in Härdelin and Lindgren, *Heliga Birgitta*, 23–33), "[M]ost scholars are agreed that the visions cannot be separated from the recording of them by the confessors." However, even the texts supposedly least worked on by the secretaries, e.g. Extrav.: 71, are full of New Testament parallels (the sermon on the mount, to turn the other cheek, the good Samaritan, the calling of the disciples, the injunction to offer an enemy one's tunic when he has taken one's cloak).

55 Rev. I: 1.9 and 1.13: "Tu autem, filia mea, quam elegi michi et cum qua spiritu meo loquor … Ego sum verus propheta. Si verbis meis credideris et compleueris ea, oleum et gaudium et exultacio tibi non deficient usque in sempiternum."

run out in her house until it pleases the Lord to let the rain fall again. The meaning of this is that Christ is the new Elijah who moves into the house of the distressed widow Birgitta and supplies her with whatever she needs until better, eschatological times draw near.

Birgitta's self-image as a prophet is evident from the choice of words in Rev. IV: 77.16 (see also VI: 52.11): "[M]y Spirit will show you where you should go and what you should say. May you fear no one but me. You must gladly go anywhere I wish and boldly say whatever I command you, for nothing can withstand me. I will be there with you."[56] There are several Old Testament parallels to this scene. The most striking is the calling of Jeremiah (1:7–8): "You shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you."[57]

The revelation VI: 54.12–13 (Italy, *c.* 1350 or later) depicts the Blessed Virgin as a spring irrigating the dry earth. Before the Incarnation, the world was like a desert with a muddy well. This narrative corresponds structurally to Jeremiah (Ch. 2). Christ came to this desert and taught the way of self-restraint, away from the well of vice. The imagery and wording in this passage is made up of a condensed series of biblical phrases from the prophets and the Gospels (Isa. 33:8; Isa. 62:1; Isa. 62:6; Isa. 65:6; Jer. 16:9; Matt. 21:41).

The biblical idioms seem to have determined the vision, possibly more than logical reasoning. The strange use of *dissipari* (in classical Latin "to be dispersed" or "scattered," here meaning "be deserted") cannot be explained except as a vulgatism.

Birgitta's plans for the church in her monastery in Vadstena (Extrav.: 28) resemble in several ways the prophet Ezekiel's vision (Chs. 40–48) of the future Temple in Jerusalem. The architectonical details of wall (*murus*), windows (*fenestre*), stairway (*gradûs*), doors (*ostia*), etc., as well as the particular interest in precise measurements in cubits (*cubiti* in the Vulgate, *ulne* in *Revelations*), and its orientation, related to three of the four cardinal points, imply more similarities than what is demanded by the nature of things.

Another example of intertextuality is Rev. IV: 37.2–3 (Italy, *c.* 1350 or later), where Christ states that he will go relentlessly with his plow over gentiles and Christians. This is a cento of numerous vulgatisms in prophetic oracles and hardly intelligible without that background: Deut. 24:16; Mic. 3:12; Jer. 4:27 (cf.

56 "Spiritus meus monstrabit tibi, quo pergere debeas et quid loquaris. Et neminem timeas nisi me set gaudenter, quocumque voluero, debes pergere et intrepida dicere, quod tibi mandauero, quoniam michi nichil potest resistere et ego tecum volo manere."

57 "[A]d omnia quae mittam te ibis et universa quæcumque mandavero tibi loqueris. Ne timeas a facie eorum, quia tecum sum ut eruam te, dicit Dominus."

Jer. 5:18 and 30:11; Isa. 10:23); Jer. 13:14; 46:28; 51:3; Ezek. 3:19; 24:14; Isa. 5:9 (cf. Isa. 6:11; Jer. 4:7 and 33:10; Zeph. 3:6). After this cannonade of divine wrath, Birgitta intercedes (Rev. IV: 37.4–8) with the words and strategy of Abraham, entreating Christ to abstain from punishing the world (Gen. 18:30), only to assume another biblical character, that of the rich man in hell, who pleads for his brothers still alive on earth (Luke 16:27–29). His advocacy was rejected, since Moses and the prophets were part of common knowledge. Birgitta sent her contemporaries a similar message (Rev. IV: 37.7): the Gospels and the sayings of the prophets are there for everyone to be heeded. The message is summarized in the general appeal to repent (Rev. II: 19.4).

In VI: 5.14–15, (Italy, *c.* 1350 or later, an additional paragraph), Birgitta (and her secretary) has managed to combine a succession of words and idioms from Mic. (2:4); Ezek. (3:7; 4:16; 44:8), 1 Kings (= III Reg Vulg.) 9:8; Num. (13:18); Deut. 21:20; 1 Cor. 9:27; and Isa. 10:19. In their primary biblical context, these words refer to oppressors in general, the siege of Jerusalem, disobedient children, neglectful priests, the unfaithful Israelites exiled to Babylon, the result of invasions, and the scouts sent by Moses to the promised land, with its strong defenders, respectively. To the modern reader, these expressions seem farfetched and ambiguous, but to a readership utterly familiar with the Latin Bible, they elicit a number of associations: spineless, reckless, careless expectations of perpetual prosperity suddenly turned into tragedy.

These examples from the *Revelations* could easily be multiplied. To appreciate fully the suggestiveness of Birgitta's criticism, one has to be mindful of such intertextualities. This heaping up of vulgatisms proves Birgitta's dependence on biblical narratives and idioms. If such allusions are not marked by editors, the biblical-prophetical timbre can escape unnoticed by the reader.

There is no reason to doubt the statement in the canonization process that Birgitta had a stupendous acquaintance with the Bible. Like the prophets, she was a reformer. She advocated a return to the ideal community or the early Church. Such a reform focused on personal conversion, the spirit of penance, and the practice of the sacraments. Birgitta also advocated the implementation of the Gregorian program of institutional reform, having prelates abandon simony and other clerical vices. The conversion of the pope was the first requirement of this radical reform of the Church *in capite et in membris*. Justice was the first and fundamental virtue to be pursued by those in power.[58]

58 Ingvar Fogelqvist has analysed Birgitta's project of Church reform in his *Apostasy and Reform in the Revelations of St. Birgitta* (Stockholm: 1993). For a discussion of Birgitta's political engagement, especially concerning papal politics and reform, see Chapter 3 by Unn Falkeid in the present volume.

12 Birgitta the Conduit

In the *Revelations,* the widow Birgitta is betrothed to Christ, and she becomes both God's prophet, his Spouse, and his "channel."[59] The noun *canale* (or *canalis*) should not be rendered "mouthpiece," which has been the traditional translation.[60] The primary concrete denotations "downpipe," "conduit-pipe," or "channel" are more apposite. Birgitta was the conduit of a liquid, namely the words of God that satisfy those who thirst for love, warm the cold, cheer the troubled, and heal those who are weak in spirit.[61]

Birgitta does not seem to be unaware of the theological theories of the conditions of prophetical rapture. Several times she speaks of herself in the third person, like St Paul: "A person who was keeping vigil in prayer and was not asleep had a spiritual vision in which she seemed to see an unfathomable vast palace."[62] "A person, who was watching in vigil, not sleeping but persevering in prayer, was carried off in spirit. At that moment, all the strength of her body seemed to fail, but her heart was inflamed."[63] Jesus explains to his Spouse that "You do not see the sight you see as it is in fact … spiritual beings appear to you as if they had bodies … Spiritual words are spoken to you by means of analogies, since you cannot grasp them otherwise."[64] Her auditions are, in

59 The most extensive discussion of Birgitta's prophetic vocation is Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*.

60 The earliest attestation of *mouthpiece* (part of an instrument) in English is from 1673; in metaphorical sense, 1776. The corresponding Swedish *språkrör* ("ear trumpet" or "acoustic tube") is first attested in 1745.

61 Rev. V: 11.10. The word *canale* is used once in the concrete sense, in Rev. V: 52.107, relating to icicles pendant from downpipes.

62 Rev. IV: 7.1: "Vni persone vigilanti in oracione et non dormienti videbatur in spirituali visione, quasi videret palacium incomprehensibile magnitudine."

63 "Vna persona vigilans et non dormiens set in oracione persistens in spiritu rapta fuit. Et tunc omnes corporis eius vires quasi deficere videbantur, set cor ipsius inflammabatur," Rev. IV: 139.1; Rev. VII: 13.8; 19.1. See also Petrus Venerabilis, *De miraculis libri duo*, in PL, vol. 189, col. 948: "non dormiens set vigilans, sub divo positus atque orationis toto corde intentus"; Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, CCCM 43, vol. 1: 4: "Visiones uero quas uidi, non eas in somnis, nec dormiens, nec in phrenesi, nec corporeis oculis aut auribus exterioris hominis, nec in abditis locis percepi, sed eas vigilans et circumspecta in pura mente, oculis et auribus interioris hominis, in apertis locis, secundum voluntatem Dei accepi."

64 "Visio, quam vides, non videtur tibi, sicut est … videntur tibi spiritualia quasi corporalia … Spiritualia vero verba cum similitudine tibi dicuntur; spiritus enim tuus aliter non potest capere." Rev. II: 18: 2.4 and 7. See also Thomas Aquinas, who in *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 174, a. 2, ad 4, states that it is not normal in the present life to understand anything without recourse to a mental imagery.

spite of appearances, "probably" an interior process, says Christ.[65] Saint Ambrose reminds her of the same thing.[66]

The visionary state of mind is sometimes felt as a pleasant numbness. Birgitta perceived the words given to her as sweet food, satisfying in a way that made her even hungrier.[67] She once prayed in the Roman basilica Santa Maria Maggiore and fell into a hypnotic state; her body felt heavier but she did not fall asleep.[68] According to the *Regula Salvatoris*, the rule of her monastic order, Birgitta received the whole text in one single moment, not like something written down, but rather as if all the words were heard at the same time and yet could be distinguished from each other. This vision (or audition) remained until she was able to memorize it. There remained a sweet feeling that could almost make her heart burst.[69]

13 Inspiration

In the *Revelations*, Birgitta is portrayed as a prophet not by inclination but by vocation. She meditates on her unworthiness and some aspects that she hardly understands. The words she receives are obscure, and so were those given to the biblical prophets, "for the Lord, for whom all things are present, sometimes says things in present time that apply to the future, and sometimes speaks about things to be accomplished as if they have already been accomplished. Sometimes, too, he mixes the past and the future."[70] The same thing happens to Birgitta: "Thus, you should not be troubled if certain things are said in an obscure way or if predictions do not turn out as you expect, since God's words can be understood in various ways. Whenever this happens I will point out the truth." The statements about the future do not come true, they must be

65 Rev. II: 13.6.

66 Rev. III: 6.1; IV: 58.16. Cf. Aristotle, *De anima* III 7, 431a16-17; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* II, Chs. 80–81.

67 Rev. IV: 77.3–6; IV: 129.88–89; VI: 52.3–4. The image of God's word as sweet food occurs in Ezek. 3:3, Apoc. 10:9, also in Henry Suso and in Theresa of Avila; see Lindblom, *Prophecy*, 190.

68 Rev. IV: 78.3.

69 RS, the P text, pp. 283–85.

70 Rev. III: 19.23. Mathias, in his *Alphabetum* ("Virtus sacri Eloquii," 166), quotes Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, 3, 28: "it [the Bible] sometimes tells of past events in order to express things in the future"; "sic aliquando transacta narrat, vt ventura exprimat." The same idea occurs in Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Hiezechihelem prophetam*, 1, 10, and in Thomas Aquinas, *Catena aurea in Iohannem*, 1.16.

interpreted in some way other than the one she imagined.[71] Her mission is to "hear and see things spiritual" and to direct the message in writing to certain persons. Like the prophets of old, she was assisted by interpreters and secretaries.[72] Perhaps she thinks of Baruch, the secretary of Jeremiah, who took down the dictate of the prophet in two different versions (the first one was burnt by a furious king, the other was complemented with several amendments). Baruch read and explained the prophecies in public, when the prophet himself had been refused admittance to the temple (Jeremiah 36).[73]

There was not one specific theory in the Middle Ages about the *inspiration of the Bible*.[74] What we call inspiration was subsumed under the headline of "gift of prophecy." How, and in what sense, are the biblical texts inspired by God? That they are so inspired seems clear from two statements in the New Testament, 2 Tim. 3:16: "Every scripture is inspired by God [*theopneustos/divinitus inspirata*] and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"; and 2 Peter 1:20 f. (in the reading of the Vulgate): "No prophecy in Scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever born of human will; rather, holy men of God have spoken inspired by the Holy Spirit." Nobody doubted that God was the ultimate source of the message, but there is no clear understanding of which part the human agents played in the forming of the text. The mainstream Fathers of the Church had rejected the theory of Philo of Alexandria, the "mantic" hypothesis, that the Holy Spirit possesses the writer to the extent that he loses control of himself and is reduced to a hand, with no will of its own. But conscience is not disconnected. The activity of the human writer was not defined more closely; through a human speaker, God speaks human language (*per hominem more hominum loquitur*), said Augustine about God.[75] The terms used to denote the biblical author (*syngrafeus/auctor*) suggest that he was a person active to a normal extent.[76]

71 Rev. III: 33.5: "[N]on debes turbari, si aliqua obscure dicuntur aut si predicta non fient secundum cogitatum tuum, quia verba Dei diuersimode intelligi possunt. Et quociens hoc contingit, veritatem eorum indicabo."

72 Extrav.: 46.1–5.

73 Moses objected that he was no speaker; his brother Aron was then assigned as his "prophet," Exod. 4:10–16.

74 R.F. Collins, "Inspiration," in Brown et al., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1023–33.

75 Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 17. 6, 2; J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 2nd ed. (London: 1960), 60–64.

76 On divine and human authorship, see also Chapter 1 by F. Thomas Luongo in the present volume.

14 Henry of Ghent on Inspiration

For the question of how divine inspiration relates to the human author, Henry of Ghent (*doctor sollemnis*, d. 1293) is of specific relevance. As an Augustinian teacher in Paris after the death of Thomas Aquinas in 1274, and his opponent on some points, Henry discusses extensively the issue of divine and human interaction in the making of the biblical texts.

Henry introduces a simile: the real author of a material object is not the craftsman but the one who produces the design and masters all the tricks of the trade; the craftsman can do everything pertinent to his trade without knowing all the methods of his craft.[77] Henry quotes what Augustine said about St John: he spoke as well as he could, under inspiration, but as a human; he did not describe the whole of reality but spoke within the limits of human experience, like all teachers and all biblical authors.[78] The latter had understood completely the principles of the knowledge that they treated, not only as instruments and channels (*organa et canalia*) as the words passed through them, and certainly not as craftsmen and painters, inasmuch as they wrote down this knowledge: rather, they ought to be called authors (*auctores*), although in a secondary sense, according to the knowledge *infused* into them from above, just as the philosophers, when describing their knowledge, took it from a treasure *acquired* through their own effort.[79]

This is, to my knowledge, the only parallel of "channel" as a metaphor for the mediation of divine revelation. Henry further analyses what might be called the development of doctrine, or the creative transmission of revelation. Firstly, the Bible is not to be understood as a book but as two epochs, the Old and the New Dispensation. The teaching of the New Testament is already present in the Old, but not only as something explicit in relation to something implicit, nor as something lucid in relation to something obscure, but as something perfect in relation to something imperfect. The apostolic teaching is somewhat different; it does not exist in the Gospels as the perfect in the imperfect, but as the explicit in relation to what is not yet fully explicit, or as the work of art compared to the design (as *exemplatum* to *exemplum*).

In an analogous way, the Doctors of the Church, according to Henry, specified more accurately what the apostles had left to their successors to clarify in greater detail. Christ sketched a method when interpreting the parable of the

77 This example is taken from Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I 1, 981b26-982a3.

78 Augustine, *In Ioannem tractatus* I, 1; CCL 36: 8, 1.

79 Henry of Ghent, *Summa questionum ordinariarum*, I, a. 9, q. 2, resp.; reprint of the 1520 edition, Franciscan Institute Publications 1 (New York: 1953).

sower (Mark 4:1–12 with parallels). This constitutes a model for how to understand the rest of the Gospels, which he has not explained himself. The Spirit was indeed given to the apostles as a "first fruit" (Rom. 8:23), but the full force of it was not developed until later, in the total history of the Church. Through the Bible, the faithful were to receive it and to practice it.[80] The *doctores* should explain Scripture following the apostolic model. But whatever is original must build on what has been transmitted.[81]

But is a woman able to contribute to this expository process? Henry poses the question, for an answer in the negative suggests the famous dictums of Paul that women should be silent in the congregations (1 Cor. 14:34), and that they not be allowed "to teach" (1 Tim. 2:12). Henry's opinion is that women should not appear in public as preachers or teachers, but they may indeed do so in private. If women are commissioned to teach men, they do it because of a special charisma. Augustine speaks of the Virgin Mary, who taught the apostles in private. They were indeed instructed by the Holy Spirit and had access to the whole truth during the public ministry of Jesus. But she had learnt the depths of the truth in an incomparable way. Many things were revealed to them through her. She had not only received instruction, she had experienced the effects of it. She knew the innermost meaning of the mysteries of Christ.[82]

Such a singular mission is brought about through a special charisma, which does not discriminate against the female sex. The mission as apostles was given to men and concerns public instruction, but such is not the case with prophecy, which can be practiced by all.[83] Every Christian, male or female, should listen carefully to this doctrine (*theologia*, the biblical revelation and the exposition of it). A judicious teacher should propose to women only such things as they have real profit from. He should not enter into details. Women, according to Henry, are curious even about things from which they have no profit.[84]

If Birgitta ever heard of these opinions, it is reasonable to assume that they must have challenged and inspired her. Birgitta actually calls the Virgin *magistra apostolorum*: Mary remained on earth after the Ascension of Christ as a teacher, theologian, and moral support to the young Church.[85] Whether

80 Ibid., 1, a. 8, q. 6, ad 2.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., art. 9, q. 2, resp.
83 Ibid., ad. 2.
84 Ibid., art. 12, q. 1, resp.
85 SA: 19.11–20. According to Gabriel Biel (d. 1495), Mary was *doctrix apostolorum* and warranted the authenticity of the oldest traditions; Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Durham, N.C.: 1983), 318.

Birgitta had any knowledge of these academic theories or not, there is a correspondence between the principles enunciated by Henry of Ghent and the plan of the *Revelations* and how it was carried out. They can be considered as highly creative glosses in the margin of the Gospels, continually reread and applied to 14th-century Europe.

15 Birgitta and the Anguish of Inspiration

Such a dynamic view of the processes of inspiration and doctrinal development was supposedly not introduced until the 19th century, when a more refined critical method began to discover the intricacies of textual history: the diverse oral and written sources of the gospels, their *Formgeschichte*, their various stylistic features, the specific situations and questions to which the various textual constituents respond, and how all these factors have influenced the final structure and wording of the whole.[86] An indication of Birgitta's identification with the biblical authors is her vivid interest in the making of the biblical texts, especially the four Gospels. Her views on inspiration were strikingly dynamic; the content of divine revelation is *not* a written text. It is a personal communication that has to be rephrased by the human recipients in a painstaking process that will never succeed completely. The evangelists and the apostles wrestled with these problems, phrasing their message continuously, constantly facing new audiences and new risks of misunderstanding. In this manner, Birgitta anticipated modern theories of the redaction history of the Gospels. It is reasonable to assume that she discussed these problems with Mathias and other theologians and was fairly well updated on the theories of her times.

In the *Liber questionum* (Rev. v: int.16.20–25), there is a lengthy discussion on the many internal variances in the Gospels. Why these discrepancies? The answer is: Jesus, the Word incarnate, preached different things in different places to different audiences, benevolent, adverse, curious, intelligent, or simple-minded. Sometimes he repeated himself, sometimes he expounded a point in more detail, attempted to be more specific, and drew conclusions. Those who wrote down and edited his words reached different results. Some of them recorded his teaching verbatim, some just the core of it, some rendered

86 A Swedish theologian, Ericus Olai (d. 1486), called the authors of the Bible "instruments and pens" of the Holy Spirit, which leaves little to human agency. Fr. Stegmüller (ed.), *Regule sacræ theologiæ, Analecta Upsaliensia theologiam medii ævi illustrantia*, vol. 1 (Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift) 7 (Uppsala: 1953).

hearsay or reversed the order of the narratives. Some of them focused on his divine nature, others on the human aspects of his activities. But they were all inspired by the same Holy Spirit. The phrasing might vary, but all narratives are equally true.

Even the evangelists had to wrestle with their texts and revise their drafts. They suffered from the same anguish that every author has to face until what must be said has found a satisfactory expression. Birgitta speaks about the word of God as a wooden statue, graven and painted by the carpenter Christ. When his friends see it, they notice that it can be painted with even brighter colors. Birgitta considered and reconsidered what she had received until she arrived at the true meaning of the words.[87] God has not presented a book to the Church, according to Birgitta, but content that must be formulated and disseminated by intelligent, independent, and responsible agents. When received, in one way or another, it should be pondered and reformulated over and over again, until a wording which is as adequate as possible is found. The persons appointed to communicate the heavenly message in new epochs and situations are to be seen as accountable editors. Their achievement is compared to that of sculptors and painters. They are conscious channels, or conduits, of the message (the metaphors used by Henry of Ghent, albeit with somewhat different accents).

In the beginning of the fourth book of the *Revelations*, the Bible is praised as the "golden Scripture." The true God is honored and His gospel preached in it, the acts of the patriarchs are narrated, and the prophetical effusions of the Spirit are explained. John the Evangelist is introduced as the one who fully understood the golden Scripture and added to it his personal understanding of its message.[88] Even the Bible is not a complete and immutably fixed text. This doctrine is in accordance with the Franciscan theologian Bonaventure (d. 1274), who claimed that history is a process during which the Bible is increasingly better understood and explained.[89] Bonaventure has demonstrably exercised a certain influence on Mathias.[90]

Birgitta was a disciple of Mathias in an epoch of *schriftlose Theologie*, when theology had severed itself from the Bible to become philosophical speculation, developing ever more sophisticated ramifications of *questiones*. Mathias

87 Extrav.: 49.6–8. *Infusion* (of supernatural unmerited grace) is the opposite of *acquisition* (through natural effort and studies), see Henry of Ghent, above. For a further discussion of this revelation and Birgitta's authorial role, see Chapter 1 of the present volume.

88 Rev. IV: 1.14.

89 See the examples adduced by Joseph Ratzinger, *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura* (Munich: 1959), 86.

90 Piltz, "Mathias of Sweden," 142.

and his famous confessant wanted theologians and laypersons to return to the sources of divine revelation.[91] Whereas Mathias explained the deeper meaning of a text, the Apocalypse of St John, with its scenario of the world, with its history of crime and punishment, promise and recompense, Birgitta had a more dynamic mission: to act as a channel of the word of God in concrete situations, as the Old Testament prophets had done in their times.

Mathias and Birgitta were both equally convinced that they lived in the last period of history. The corruption of the Church was clear proof of this. Mathias, the interpreter of the Bible, considered it his task to elucidate the mysteries of the Apocalypse of St John. The Spirit invoked by Mathias also provided Birgitta, Christ's spouse and channel, with a torrent of precise and detailed instructions. Both thought of themselves above all as expositors.

91 Mathias of Linköping, *Exposicio*, X: 99–100; 108.

CHAPTER 3

The Political Discourse of Birgitta of Sweden

Unn Falkeid

In a revelation (Rev. 1: 23), Birgitta of Sweden hurls out an unusually harsh critique of a man of great reputation. Who this man was, is not clear. But in the following explanation, conveyed by St Lawrence, the addressee appears to be the pope. The revelation is dated to the 1340s, but there are indications that it may also have been written later, presumably after Birgitta's arrival in Rome in the winter of 1349:

> People think he is a well-dressed, strong, and dignified man, active in the battle of the Lord. However, when his helmet is removed, he is disgusting to look at and unfit for any work. His naked brain can be seen, his ears are on his forehead, his eyes at the back of his head. His nose is cut off. His cheeks are all sunken like those of a dead man. On the right side, his cheekbone and half of his lips have all fallen off, so nothing remains on the right except his uncovered throat. His chest is full of swarming worms; his arms are like a pair of snakes. An evil scorpion sits in his heart; his back looks like burned coal. His intestines are stinking and rotten like pus-filled flesh, his feet are dead and useless for walking.[1]

The revelation is an acrimonious piece of text, which aims to reveal the profound fraud of the head of the Church, and the historical framework for it is obviously abandoned Rome, emphasized by the voice of St Lawrence. Since his death in the middle of the 3rd century, the pious deacon, or *minister Dei* (servant of God), who suffered his martyrdom for the sake of the city came to represent the poor and needy Romans. Now he appears for Birgitta in order to

1 Rev. 1: 23.1–2: "Ille talis videtur hominibus quasi homo bene ornatus, fortis et decorus et in pugna domini sui strenuus sed, amota galea a capite eius, est abhominabilis ad videndum et inutilis ad operandum. Apparet enim cerebrum eius nudum. Aures habet in fronte, oculos in occipite. Nasus eius abscisus est. Gene eius ex toto contracte quasi hominis mortui. Maxilla eius ex dextera parte cum faucibus et dimidietate labii tota deciderat, ita quod nichil ex dextera parte remanet nisi guttur solum, quod nudum apparet. Pectus eius plenum est vermibus scaturientibus, brachia eius quasi duo serpentes. Cor impletum est pessimo scorpione, dorsum eius velut combustus carbo. Intestina eius sunt fetencia et corrupta quasi caro habundans sanie, pedes eius mortui et inutiles ad incedendum."

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explain what she has experienced, and what we learn from his speech is that the man, "active in the battle of the Lord," is probably Pope Clement VI, who was then living in Avignon.

This is the drama that Birgitta stages for her readers. The most intriguing element of the quotation is that it uncovers the author's familiarity with contemporary political rhetoric. The image of the head reflects the medieval notions of the body politic that were primarily ushered in by the 12th-century humanist John of Salisbury. In his tractate *Policraticus* ("The Statesman's Book"), he configured the prince as the head of the state (*res publica*).[2] Some few decades before Birgitta wrote her revelation, however, Pope Boniface VIII had transferred the imagery of the head to the Church. In 1302 he published his infamous bull *Unam sanctam*, as the result of the bitter feud with the French king Philip the Fair about the question of sovereignty. Reactivating John of Salisbury's rhetoric of the body politic, Boniface claimed that the pope was not only the head of the Church, but also the head of the worldly princes. His power was absolute, both in religious and secular matters, condensed in the potent hierarchical and hierocratic metaphor of the *caput*. Yet, according to Birgitta, this head was at the moment nothing but monstrous, and it sat atop a rotten, dreadful body.

There is an insistent focus on political arguments and events in Birgitta's *Revelations*. She concerned herself with the government of the church and the fortune of the state. She became involved in the regime of King Magnus Eriksson of Sweden, raising questions about his planned crusades towards Russia. She was deeply engaged in the escalating conflict between England and France, and she encouraged the pope to find a solution in the wars between the papal states in Northern Italy and the expanding power of the Visconti of Milan. She befriended Queen Johanna of Naples, while at the same time criticizing her moves in the international political landscape. She worked for the reformation of the Church, and, most importantly, she strove to convince the popes in Avignon and the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire to return to Rome, and by this to restore the political and institutional center of Christendom.

Political and ecclesiastic questions run like a red thread throughout the *Revelations*. In connection to the canonization process after her death, Birgitta's confessor, Alfonso of Jaén, gathered what he probably regarded as the most significant of them in two books: *Tractatus de summis pontificibus* ("Treatise to the Highest Pontiffs") and *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges* ("The Heavenly Emperor's Book to Kings"). In the following I shall focus upon these two books.

2 Jacques Le Goff, "Head or Heart? The Political Use of Body Metaphors in the Middle Ages," in *Fragments of a History of the Human Body*, ed. Michael Feher (New York: 1989), vol. 1: 13–26.

Alfonso's plan may have been to compile the revelations into a structure that reflects Augustine's partition between the earthly city and the heavenly city in his influential *De civitate Dei*. In Alfonso's introduction to *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges*, Augustine is referred to as one of the models. However, both tractates, like most of Birgitta's revelations, have an actual temporal purpose as well. What they offer us is a clear picture of the author's observations and responsiveness to the pressing political questions of her time, while concurrently revealing how her notions were embedded in a long tradition of political thought.

1 The Papal Exile in Avignon

In order to reach a fuller understanding of Birgitta's political thought and actions, it is necessary to study the *Revelations* in the light of the actual historical setting. What formed the political scenery and intellectual debates of the 14th century was the long sojourn of the pope and the Roman curia in Avignon, often labeled the "Babylonian captivity" of the pope.[3] The Avignon papacy and the resistance it created caused one of the most serious crises in the history of the Church, which ended in the Great Western Schism (1378–1418). The leading minds of 14th-century Europe took part in the debates, and the Avignon papacy was the principal context for Birgitta's revelations as well.[4]

The papacy resided in the city of Avignon in Provence in southern France from 1309 to 1377, a period which more or less coincides with Birgitta's lifespan. The reasons for Pope Clement V's decision to settle in Provence were many. The immediate motive was the political instability caused by the incessant feuds in Rome between the city's mighty barons, such as the Colonna, the Caetani, and the Orsini families. Comtat Venaissin in Provence was the only transalpine papal territory. Its main city, Avignon, was a vassal of the House of Anjou, which was loyal to the pope. Avignon was thus a safe place, protected by King Charles, and later by his successors King Robert and Robert's daughter Queen Johanna of Naples. It was far from Rome, but still with a certain proximity to the city

3 The most important historical studies of the Avignon papacy are Guillaume Mollat, *The Popes at Avignon, 1305–1378* (London: 1963 [1912]); Yves Renouard, *The Avignon Papacy: The Popes in Exile, 1305–1403* (New York: 1994 [1954]); and Joëlle Rollo-Koster, *Avignon and its Papacy, 1309–1417* (Landham, Md.: 2015).

4 I have previously explored the political debates in the 14th century with a particular focus on Dante, Marsilius of Padua, William of Ockham, Petrarch, Birgitta of Sweden, and Catherine of Siena. See Unn Falkeid, *The Avignon Papacy Contested: An Intellectual History from Dante to Catherine of Siena* (Cambridge, Mass.: 2017).

through the royal family in Naples. Another reason for the dislocation was the papacy's effort to bring peace between England and France, a question that particularly interested Birgitta. The conflict between the two states, which only reinforced the national identities of both countries, led in 1337 to the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War. Moreover, Avignon was an appealing city, strategically located on the trading route between southern and northern Europe, with a better climate than the hot and malaria-ridden Rome, and with a tranquil and loyal population. All this made Avignon a far more favorable place than Rome, and a city from which it was easier to govern the Christian world.

The successes, both political and economic, of the Avignon papacy were soon to be revealed. In the following decades the papacy grew in power and wealth. The Church went through an extensive centralization process, the consequence of which was a constantly growing institutional bureaucracy. Through an intricate, centralized taxation system, the papal incomes increased in line with the growing authority of the pope. It was, as the historian Guillaume Mollat has described it, a glorious period for the city, with tournaments, dinners, weddings, and dances.[5] Ironically, more accounts of civil feasts appear to have been preserved from the papal palace than records of religious banquets. The city itself was soon turned into a cosmopolitan center, far more important than Rome. It gathered notaries, traders, artisans, architects, lawyers, physicians, artists, and merchants from all over Europe, which led to a cultural boom along with the economic upturn. In short, Avignon became a crossroads for intellectual and cultural exchanges, where early forms of humanism would flourish, and where innovative ideas concerning art, music, philology, and poetry arose.

This swift fortune of the papacy was closely connected to a thorough reorganization of the Church. Although Boniface's bull *Unam sanctam* was annulled some few months after it was issued, it came to create the foundation for the popes' theocratic claim to sovereignty over secular rulers in the following decades. The waxing monarchical structure of the Church reflected to a certain degree the general political tendency toward absolutism within various European states in the 14th and 15th centuries. However, in Avignon the development was rapid. The pope's jurisdiction expanded, and soon the papal court outshone all the secular courts in Europe. This did not go unnoticed. Indeed, the papacy's settlement in France, and the consequent burgeoning secular power and wealth of the pope, created strong resistance, which came from mixed groups of people with various intentions and arguments. One group

5 Mollat, *The Popes at Avignon*, 313.

was the Franciscans, who traditionally had close bonds with the papacy. Now a bitter conflict broke out, with fatal consequences for many friars. The critics consisted, moreover, of the Italian *signori*, who supported the emperor's control over the *regnum italicum*; of the Italian members of the papal curia, whose numbers, during the Avignon papacy, were reduced to a minimum; and of the many Italian immigrants—traders, notaries, and artisans—in Provence. Another important faction of opponents, though highly heterogeneous, comprised early humanists and intellectuals of the 14th century, such as Dante Alighieri, Marsilius of Padua, William of Ockham, and Catherine of Siena—and Birgitta of Sweden must be counted among them.

Throughout the Middle Ages, a balance between temporal and spiritual power had served as the model for governance and also for common political theory. The notion was founded on Pope Gelasius I's principle from the end of the 5th century known as "the two powers." In other words, a certain moderation had for a long time been the ideal, despite the Investiture Controversy in the 11th century, which resulted in the pope assuming moral leadership of Christendom, and despite the canon lawyers, who strongly defended the pope's supremacy. However, with Pope Boniface VIII's bull *Unam sanctam*, and the following Avignonese popes' claim to absolute power (*plenitudo potestatis*), the balance was greatly disturbed, and the effects were dramatic. A literary war broke out, which engaged intellectuals all over Europe and which rivaled in length and bitterness any previous contest between the papacy and a secular ruler. A stream of tractates and treatises both for and against the sovereignty of the pope were written, such as *De ecclesiastica potestate* (1302) by Giles of Rome, *De regimine christiano* (1302) by James of Viterbo, *De potestate regia et papali* (*c.* 1302) by John of Paris, *Monarchia* (*c.* 1318) by Dante, and *Defensor pacis* (1324) by Marsilius of Padua. Although gathered and published later than these texts, the two compilations of Birgitta's political revelations, *Tractatus de summis pontificibus* and *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges*, must be read within this context, and what the tractates reveals is a neat attempt to restore the balance between the two powers.

2 Birgitta and the Papacy

The first compilation, the *Tractatus de summis pontificibus*, consists of the last chapters of Book IV of Birgitta's *Revelations* (Rev. IV: 132–44). Book IV, as it is read today, was published in its entirety in the first printed edition of the *Revelations*, the so-called Ghotan edition from 1492. However, in Alfonso's initial collection of the *Revelations*, which he edited for the canonization process

after Birgitta's death, the last thirteen letters of Book IV were gathered as an independent unit.[6]

Birgitta had been among those who most insistently tried to convince the pope to return from Avignon. She worked incessantly for this purpose, and Alfonso followed this up after she passed away by compiling some of her papal letters, among other things, in a separate treatise. The reason for this is not clear, but as Arne Jönsson has suggested, Alfonso compiled the letters in an attempt to help the Roman Pope Urban VI and his supporters in their conflict with the antipope, Clement VII in Avignon, during the Great Western Schism.[7]

The letters cover a span of time that begins in 1348, while Birgitta was still in Sweden, and lasts until her death in 1373. The collection opens with three revelations regarding the sinfulness of the priests and the general corruption of the Catholic Church. Rather than speaking of Christ's miracles, the priests teach the love of the world, according to Birgitta (Rev. IV: 132). They have "lost the key with which they were to open heaven for the wretched,"[8] "they make a wicked man out of a righteous one, a devil out of the simple-hearted, a wounded man out of a healthy one,"[9] and, worst of all, they act as Judas by selling and dealing with the sacrifices of Christ: "Judas sold me prior to the world's redemption. These [the priests] sell me after I have already redeemed the world … Judas sold me for money alone. These, however, sell me for any kind of merchandise, since they do not approach me unless they hope to gain something for themselves."[10]

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6 For a good introduction to *Tractatus*, see that of Bridget Morris in Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Denis Searby, with Introductions and Notes by Bridget Morris, 4 vols (Oxford: 2006–15), vol. 2: 16–18.

7 After the return of the pope and his curia to Rome, the conclave in the Vatican Palace elected in 1378 Bartolomeo Prignano, archbishop of Bari, as the new pope. However, in the wake of his reforms, the French wing of the Sacred College of Cardinals rebelled. They elected a new pope, Clement VII, who returned to Avignon. This was the opening of the Great Western Schism, which ended with the Church for a moment coming to have not only two, but even three popes. According to Jönsson, Birgitta's "insistence on Rome as home of the popes, the vilification of everything connected with Avignon, the call for reform, the violent protest against simony and a clear anti-cardinalism, were messages with renewed relevancy after the outbreak of the Great Schism, and were particularly applicable after Clement's departure for Avignon in the summer of 1379, when the anti-Avignon revelations gained relevance in a new context." See Arne Jönsson (ed.), *St. Birgitta's Revelations to the Popes: An Edition of the So-Called Tractatus de summis pontificibus* (Lund: 1997), 65–66.

8 Rev. IV: 132.5: "perdiderunt clauem, qua miseris deberent aperire celum."

9 Rev. IV: 132.6: "de iusto faciunt iniquum, de simplice dyabolum, de sano sauciatum."

10 Rev. IV: 132.9: "Iudas vendidit me, antequam redemissem mundum; isti postquam redemi mundum … Iudas venditit me pro solis denariis; isti autem omni mercimonio, quia non accedunt ad me, nisi sperent sibi fructum."

Birgitta's critique may sound harsh to modern ears. Accusing the contemporary priests of simony—that is, for the buying and selling of church offices and roles—and moreover for being greedy, lustful, and even idolatrous, as she does in the following revelation (Rev. IV: 133), her attack is indeed severe. Her images, however, are neither especially original nor exceptional. Rather the opposite: Birgitta's critique reflects the common political rhetoric of the 14th century, and particularly the language that was shared by the critics of the Avignon papacy. We meet the same dark and apocalyptic imagery among the radical Franciscans, such as Petrus Joannis Olivi or Ubertino da Casale, among the early humanists, such as Dante and Petrarch, and among scholastics, such as William of Ockham and Marsilius of Padua.[11] Yet the profound and more general rebuke in the first four revelations of Birgitta's *Tractatus* has a special function and aim. It works as an introduction to the entire treatise, and as such it emphasizes the resolution and urgency in the more specified revelations that follow (Rev. IV: 136–43).

The rest of *Tractatus*, except for the last revelation (Rev. IV: 144), consists of letters addressed directly to the popes in Avignon. The first (Rev. IV: 136) is dated 1348, that is, prior to Birgitta's departure for Rome, and is written to Pope Clement VI.[12] The intriguing aspect of this letter is how it shows Birgitta's interest in the escalating war between England and France. She encourages the pope to establish peace between the two conflicting parties, while at the same time reprimanding him for being biased, French as Pope Clement VI (or Pierre Roger) was by birth. Create peace, Birgitta advises, and then go to Rome, the sacred city where the streets are "paved with the blood of my saints."[13] The letter carries, to a certain degree, the same type of optimism which characterizes the famous call she received before she left Sweden. "Go to Rome," Christ supposedly told her,

> where the streets are paved with gold and reddened with the blood of saints and where there is a short cut, that is, a shorter way, to heaven because of the indulgences that the holy pontiffs have merited because of their prayers. Moreover, you are to stay there until you see the supreme

11 This is a central argument thoroughly discussed in my book: Falkeid, *The Avignon Papacy Contested*.

12 The letter is more or less the same as Rev. VI: 63, although some initial sentences are added in addition to a conclusion addressed to Pope Innocent VI. Jönsson has explored the variety. See Arne Jönsson (ed.), *Alfonso of Jaén. His Life and Works with Critical Editions of Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi* (Lund: 1989), 185–86.

13 Rev. IV: 136.2: "Et vide plateas stratas sanctorum meorum sanguine."

> pontiff and the emperor there at the same time in Rome, and you shall announce my words to them.[14]

This call, as well as the letter to Clement VI, was probably composed in Sweden in the same period, and they both reveal what in many ways came to be the core of Birgitta's critique of the Avignon papacy: in Birgitta's view, Rome was a holy city, a ground consecrated by the suffering and martyrdom of the saints. As she argued, its role in the unfolding salvation history was for that reason indispensable and even more significant now that Jerusalem was lost to the Muslims, and even the last refuge in the Holy Land, the port of Acre, was overrun (in 1291). If Rome was not to stumble and fall like other great cities before her, the pope must return from his exile as soon as possible. This is Birgitta's main message to the papacy in Avignon, and as we may read from the following letters, it only increased in intensity as her own life was ebbing away.

The letter to Pope Urban V in 1370 (Rev. IV: 138) exposes Birgitta's implacable impatience. Two years earlier she had for a short moment finally experienced the return of the pope and the emperor to Rome, as she was foretold in the vision in Sweden. In October 1368, Emperor Charles IV and Pope Urban V entered Rome during a solemn ceremony. Their stay, however, was short-lived. After the coronation of his wife, Elizabeth of Pomerania, Charles IV turned northwards again. Pope Urban, on the other hand, escaped the city during the summer of 1370 and moved to his castle in Montefiascone, where Birgitta visited him. Full of fury, she presented a revelation to him, urging him to "go back to Rome and Italy for no other purpose than to carry out mercy and justice, strengthen the Catholic faith, reestablish the peace and, in this way, renew the Holy Church."[15] And as with all the last letters to the popes in the *Tractatus*, the advice is followed by a threat: If the pope did not obey her, a cruel fate awaited him. If he returned to Avignon, he would be struck with a blow that would knock his teeth out, his sight would become cloudy and darkened, and he would tremble in every limb of his body.

Once again activating the language of the body politic, the threat may not have been meant to be taken literally. However, when Pope Urban traveled back to Avignon despite Birgitta's warnings, and then died soon thereafter, her

14 AP, 94: "Vade Romam, vbi platee strate sunt auro et sanguine sanctorum rubricate, vbi compendium, id est brevior via, est ad celum propter indulgencias, quas promeruerunt sancti pontifices oracionibus suis. Stabis autem ibi in Roma, donec summum pontificem et imperatorem videbis ibidem insimul in Roma et eis verba mea nunciabis."

15 Rev. IV: 138.12: "deberet ad Romam et Ytaliam declinare ad nichil aliud, nisi ut misericordiam et iusticiam faceret, fidem catholicam roboraret, pacem reformaret et sic sanctam Ecclesiam innouaret."

authority as a prophet was considerably reinforced. Of importance in our context is how her many incitements to convince the pope to go back to Rome coincide with a yearning for reformation. The pope's return and the restoration of the Holy Church are considered as two sides of the same coin, and as such inseparably connected to each other. As Birgitta depicts it in another majestic revelation, presumably received in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore just after her arrival in Rome (Rev. IV: 78), the poverty of the abandoned city, the general corruption of its inhabitants, and the wretched state of its many churches are glaring. The churches are in need of a profound restoration, and the same is said about their ministers—the wicked priests who "lead a life of carnal debauchery," and who are "as insatiable as the ocean chasm in their greed for money";[16] "Such men should not be promoted but rejected in God's church."[17] In a letter to Pope Gregory XI, who followed Pope Urban V, a schism is indeed described as a possible result of the papacy's neglect (Rev. IV: 140). Birgitta advises the pope to come to Italy next March, as she writes, or April at the latest. If he does not listen to her, "the lands of the church, which now obey him in united obedience and submission, will be divided in many parts at the hands of tyrants."[18] In this case, too, was Birgitta's prophecy fulfilled, although the Great Western Schism was not a reality before 1378. Anyway, the thought of a split within the Church seems to have haunted her in the last years of her life.

The final pilgrimage Birgitta undertook was the journey to Jerusalem in 1372. By then she had visited the principal destinations for pilgrims in the Middle Ages—Nidaros in Norway, Santiago de Compostela in Spain, and of course Rome, where she by then had lived for more than twenty years. After the disappointment of Pope Urban V's return to Avignon and the apparently lukewarm reaction of his successor, Pope Gregory XI, regarding Rome, she embarked on the last journey. This time she traveled to Jerusalem, as if to gather force from the *axis mundi*, the holy center of Christianity, for her final battle. The pilgrimage is the main subject of Book VII of her *Revelations*. However, two of the latest revelations in *Tractatus* (Rev. IV: 141–42) also stem from this journey. They are dated February 1373, when Birgitta visited Queen Johanna of Naples on her way back to Rome. In despair she once again appealed to Pope Gregory XI, this time through the voice of Christ, who supposedly came to her asking her to convey the following message:

16 Rev. IV: 78.18: "qui in carne sua vitam meretricalem habent et sunt insaciabiles ac sine fundo sicut vorago maris ad cupiditatem pecunie."

17 Rev. IV: 78.21: "Et tales in sancta Ecclesia exaltari non deberent set deprimi."

18 Rev. IV: 140.18: "terre Ecclesie, que sub una eius obediencia et subieccione modo eidem obediunt, diuidentur in plures partes in manus tyrannorum."

> Though I could justly condemn you for all the aforesaid, yet I am again admonishing you out of mercy for the salvation of your soul to come to your see in Rome as soon as you can … Come, then, and do not delay! Come not with your customary pride and worldly pomp, but with all humility and ardent love! As soon as you have thus come, uproot, pluck out and destroy all the vices of your court … Start to reform the church that I purchased with my own blood in order that it may be reformed and led back spiritually to its pristine state of holiness, for nowadays more veneration is shown to a brothel than to my Holy Church.[19]

The letter was brought to Avignon by Birgitta's confessor Alfonso of Jaén, who later compiled the revelations for *Tractatus*. And what the piece expresses is a cry, as if it was a final, desperate crescendo of Birgitta's longstanding fight to persuade the pope to return to Rome and to implement reforms that could save the Church from the disaster that she clearly understood was underway.

Finally, Birgitta did not experience the return of the pope, nor did she achieve the prevention of the Great Western Schism. She died in Rome in July the same year. Like Catherine of Siena, who took up the baton in the attempt to bring the papacy back to Italy, Birgitta was later accused by the French flank of the curia of being the troublesome person who provoked the schism. However, when Pope Gregory heard about the death of Birgitta, he sent Alfonso, who was still in Avignon, to Caterina Benincasa in Siena, also known as Catherine of Siena, asking for her alliance and support.[20] By preparing the ground in Italy, we may assume that the pope hoped for an easier return to Rome, despite the strong resistance of the French cardinals.

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19 Rev. IV: 142.11–15: "Et quamuis ex predictis possem te secundum iusticiam condempnare, tamen ex misericordia adhuc iterum moneo te de salute anime tue, videlicet ut venias Romam ad sedem tuam, quam cicius poteris … Veni igitur et noli tardare! Veni non cum superbia solita et mundana pompa set cum omni humilitate et ardenti caritate! Et postquam sic veneris, extirpa, euelle et dissipa omnia vicia de curia tua! … Incipe renouare Ecclesiam meam, quam ego acquisiui meo proprio sanguine, ut renouetur et spiritualiter reducatur ad pristinum statum suum sanctum, quia iam nunc magis veneratur lupanar quam sancta mea Ecclesia."

20 This may be read in one of Catherine's earliest letters (Letter T127). English text, Letter T127 in Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, ed. and trans. Suzanne Noffke (Tempe, Ariz.: 2000–08), vol. 1: 40. Italian text: Letter CXXVII in Catherine of Siena, *Le lettere di S. Caterina da Siena, ridotte a miglior lezione, e in ordine nuovo disposte con premio note di Niccolò Tommaseo*, ed. Niccolò Tommaseo (Florence: 1860), vol. 2: 315–16.

3 Weakness as Strength

The *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges* was compiled and edited by Alfonso of Jaén some few years after Birgitta's death, probably in 1376–77. While gathering revelations concerning papal affairs intended for the *Tractatus*, he contemporaneously collected revelations that were related to emperors and kings. Then, in the fall of 1379, he submitted the entire corpus, including *Tractatus*, *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges*, and the seven books of *Revelations*, to Pope Urban VI, together with the petition for Birgitta's canonization.[21] *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges* was, in other words, offered as a separate treatise, which it is still regarded as today, constituting Book VIII of Birgitta's *Revelations*. Like the revelations that once comprised the *Tractatus*, many of them were assembled from Books II to VII. Indeed, of the 58 revelations in Book VIII, almost half are collected from the other books. The rest are revelations that were in circulation, according to Alfonso. In the introduction that preceded the *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges*, the so-called *Epistola solitarii ad reges* ("The Hermit's Letter to Kings"), which, in fact, is an extensive treatise composed by Alfonso, he explains how he organized the revelations, but of equal importance is how he clarifies his motivation for doing it.

An obvious reason for gathering Birgitta's letters written to monarchs was to find support among European royalty for the canonization process. Indeed, Alfonso addresses the "most illustrious kings"[22] in the opening of his introduction, asking them to accept his "humble and suppliant greetings laid at the feet of your royal majesties."[23] What he then offers them is a *speculum regale*, a Mirror of Kings, which was a popular genre of political writings in the Middle Ages. A woman, though, was the author of this specific mirror, which was a most unusual thing. As Alfonso writes:

> Kings do right to take pains in investigating and by investigating to learn the character of persons who write to them concerning extraordinary and private communications of the divine will. Indeed, in these modern times so darkened by dense clouds, a woman of noble birth and shining spirit has appeared, Lady Birgitta of the kingdom of Sweden, the glory of womankind. Like a bright star she sheds shining beams of holiness

21 For a good summary of the history of the text, see the introduction by Hans Aili to the critical edition of Book VIII in Rev. VIII, pp. 17–34. See also Bridget Morris's rich introduction to the English translation, *The Revelations*, vol. 4: 3–13.

22 ES: 1.1: "serenissimi reges."

23 ES: 1.1: "supplici et humilima recommendacione premissa ante pedes vestre maiestatis regalis."

> throughout this wide world. Now, by the command of the supreme Emperor of heaven, she sends you the present book which was supernaturally revealed to her. It is like a bright mirror to aid your royal adorning and the correcting of your conduct and the holy governance of your subjects.[24]

The striking aspect of this quotation is how Alfonso presents Birgitta as a woman among peers, that is, as a woman of noble origin, a true lady (*domina*), who is later dubbed a princess and, like the addressees of the letter, a person of royal descent and birth. Evidently, such praise should have the effect of eliciting approval among the audience. At the same time, Alfonso depicts Birgitta as a divine vessel. Through a power superior to that of the kings, she is authorized to convey advice and corrections regarding the governance of their respective jurisdictions. After this follows a long explanation of the character of her revelations. Why did the heavenly Emperor select a woman to be his mouthpiece? Alfonso describes Birgitta as humble and weak, but, as he argues, God chose both in the Old and the New Testament "weak things of the world, of both female and the male sex, to show forth his might and put the wise to shame."[25] Birgitta's alleged weakness is, in other words, God's method to correct human pride, according to Alfonso.

The strong emphasis on Birgitta's humility and obedience may be read as an attempt to reduce and even divest Birgitta of her political authority. As Rosalynn Voaden has argued, the *discretio spirituum*—the processes of discerning and judging between good and evil spirits, which Birgitta's visions also went through before she left Sweden—both restricted and empowered the troublesome female body in the late Middle Ages.[26] In the *Epistola solitarii*, Alfonso refers to the importance of these processes. In particular, visions received by women had to go through careful examination. However, the presumable

24 ES: 1.2–4: "Quoniam moris regum existit velle curiose discutere et discuciendo cognoscere qualitates personarum eis scribencium aliqua insolita secreta voluntatis diuine et quia in istis modernis temporibus densa caligine tenebrosis surrexit quedam illustris generis et spiritus domina, domina Brigida de regno Suecie, decus omnium feminarum, que velut stella clarissima sanctitatis radios fulgentes diffudit per diuersa climata vasti orbis, que nunc vobis scribit precepto celestis imperatoris altissimi presentem librum infrascriptum, ei diuinitus reuelatum, quasi quoddam preclarum speculum ad ornamentum regale et correpcionem morum vestrorum ac subditorum regni sanctum regimen exercendum."

25 ES: 1.22: "quod Deus omnipotens tam in Veteri quam in Nouo Testamento ad ostendendum omnipotenciam suam sepe infirma mundi elegit sibi tam in femineo sexu quam in masculis, vt confundant sapientes."

26 Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbridge: 1999), 73.

meekness and submissiveness with which Birgitta is branded, and with which she often presents herself in the *Revelations* as well, may also be a deliberate way to raise her voice. In a period when even the pope used the humblest rhetoric, titling himself *servus servorum Dei* (servant of the servants of God), weakness could easily be turned around and used as an effective weapon. Catherine of Siena, for instance, who may even have fashioned herself on the model of Birgitta, adopted the same language when she addressed powerful men. In a letter to Pope Gregory XI from January 1376, she wrote: "Your unworthy, poor, and wretched daughter Caterina, servant and slave of Jesus Christ, is writing to you in his precious blood."[27] By means of humbleness and even by phrases that reflect the pope's own rhetoric, the quotation reveals how Catherine positioned herself as an infallible source and a prophet who expected to be heard.[28]

Alfonso was eager to promote Birgitta as a prophet, as others in her group also did.[29] In *Epistola solitarii,* he compares her with biblical men and women—with Moses, whom he describes as *homo simplex* (a simple man), and with Mary, the sister of Aron, with Judith, Esther, Anna, and Elizabeth, the wife of Zachary. Moreover, he equates her with the sibyls, which later became a common association regarding Birgitta.[30] The question is, did this reduce Birgitta to a disembodied mouthpiece of divine messages, or was it a strategy to promote female authority? Whatever the correct answer may be, what most scholars agree upon is that the status as prophet resulted in being highly successful, especially in a period when women were excluded from the traditional institutions, such as the universities or the ecclesiastic hierarchy. There is no doubt that Birgitta as well, and not only her male supporters, fashioned her *persona* on the image of a prophet.[31] And the effect was striking: Birgitta's recurring textual self-presentation as a divine vessel, a meek and humble instrument of God, paved the way for her thunderous critique of powerful people. The same may be said about her successor Catherine of Siena. With an extraordinary vibrancy and strength, both women entered the contemporary political battlefields. And what is clear is that their voices had strong appeal: their

27 Letter CLXXXV in Catherine of Siena, *Le lettere*, vol. 3: 69–70: "A Voi, reverendissimo e dilettissimo padre in Cristo Gesù, la vostra indegna, misera, miserabile figliuola Catarina, serva e schiava de' servi di Gesù Cristo, scrive nel prezioso sangue suo." For the English translation, see Letter T185 in Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, vol. 1: 244.

28 Blake Beattie, "Catherine of Siena and the Papacy," in *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, eds. Carolyn Muessig, George Ferzoco, and Beverly Mayne Kienzle (Leiden: 2012), 84.

29 In their *Vita*, Birgitta's confessors confirmed her status as a prophet; AP, 86.

30 Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: 2001), 174, n. 23.

31 On Birgitta's self-image as a prophet, see Chapter 2 by Anders Piltz in the present volume.

public, prophetic speech came to constitute a model for women writers in the coming generations.[32]

4 An Astute Politician

While the *Tractatus de summis pontificibus* deals with the papacy, the *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges* addresses temporal monarchs. Together they offer not only reflections on what characterizes a good pope, but also notions on the ideal king. Most intriguing is perhaps how the tractates discuss, in subtle ways, the lost but, according to Birgitta, required equilibrium between the two orders, that is, the ecclesiastic and the secular power.

The revelations are addressed to European monarchs. Many of them are written to the king of Sweden, Magnus Eriksson and his Flemish wife, Queen Blanche of Namur, but several are directed to other regents as well, such as Eleanor of Aragon, queen of Cyprus; her son, Peter II; King Philip VI of France; King Edward III of England; and, of course, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV, who became an enthusiastic supporter of Birgitta's.[33] She frequently offers precise advice demonstrating a cautious attention toward specific events. Initially she is, for instance, full of care when it comes to the Swedish monarch, to whom she was closely related. When he was elected king of Sweden and Norway, Magnus Eriksson was only three years old, so a council consisting of persons from the aristocracy and the church governed in his place. For a period Birgitta's uncle, Knut Jönsson of Aspenäs, led the council, and later Birgitta's brother worked as *officialis generalis* when the king was absent. When the king married Blanche, Birgitta was appointed *magistra* to the young queen, which was an influential position. Birgitta belonged, in other words, to the small but powerful aristocracy, and as the revelations in *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges* display, she was highly familiar with state affairs and matters concerning the monarchy.

The revelations indicate that in the early years of his reign Birgitta had great sympathy with the Swedish monarch, giving both the king and the queen encouraging advice. Gradually, and especially after her move to Rome, the tone

32 The impact of Birgitta of Sweden on Renaissance women writers and intellectuals is the topic of the interdisciplinary research project that I direct: *The Legacy of Birgitta of Sweden: Women, Politics and Reform in Renaissance Italy* (funded by the Norwegian Research Council, 2018–21).

33 Emperor Charles IV was an owner of one of the earliest copies of Birgitta's *Revelations*, and he was among those who signed a petition for her canonization in 1377. See Bridget Morris, in Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations*, vol. 4: 10.

became more disdainful and even directly harsh. Despite Birgitta's warnings, Magnus Eriksson went on a crusade in the mid-1340s to the regions east of the Baltic Sea (Rev. VIII: 39–47). In the wake of the unsuccessful crusade and the calamities that succeeded it, some of which were not his fault, such as the Great Plague, Magnus's difficulties only increased. Birgitta, for her part, became more critical. The king's economic pressure on the Church and the Swedish aristocracy elicited her contempt, as did his political instability and, according to Birgitta, cowardly decisions. From Rome, then, she issued a program for treason against the king, which, as Bridget Morris has convincingly argued, revealed Birgitta's eye for *Realpolitik* as well as her astute political strategies.[34] The program was designed as a revelation, which is, in fact, one of the two remaining autographs in Old Swedish.[35] The first part of it is rendered at the end of Rev. VIII: 56, while the rest may be found in *Revelaciones extravagantes* (Ch. 80). What the revelation conveys, though, is an appeal to have the king deposed. Through the demand of Christ, Birgitta encourages four noblemen, to whom the letter is addressed, to seek help among both the high and the low nobility, but also among the far broader group of Swedish farmers, to rebel against the king. At the end of Rev. VIII: 56, Birgitta states: "Even if this king scorns my words, another will surely come who will welcome them reverently and worshipfully and will take advantage of them for his salvation."[36] It would, in other words, be a profitable task to follow Birgitta's advice.

Despite often being connected to particular situations, several of Birgitta's recommendations to the kings and queens in *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges* are of a more general character, which indeed fits the genre of Mirror of Kings. As Alfonso notes in his introduction, the *Epistola solitarii*, the revelations deal with a host of issues. In a long litany he summarizes the entire content of the treatise: The revelations discuss:

> …how kings should dress, when they should wear the crown, how devout and upright kings may live moral lives, what kinds of queens their wives should be, what kind of men the kings should appoint and maintain as counselors, which ones they should remove from office and expel, how they should select knights and noblemen, how they should treat their subjects and commoners, how they should rule their kingdoms and

34 See Bridget Morris's introduction in Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations*, vol. 4: 9.

35 The other is Rev. IV: 49. For the discussions of the autograph, see Hans Torben Gilkær, *The Political Ideas of St. Birgitta and Her Spanish Confessor, Alfonso Pecha. Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges: A Mirror of Princes* trans. Michael Cain (Odense: 1993), 17–19.

36 Rev. VIII: 56.102: "Set licet iste rex contempserit verba mea, veniet utique alius, qui recepturus est ea cum reuerencia et honore et fruiturus est eis ad salutem suam."

> promote the nation and defend it zealously with tender compassion, and how they should wage war and crusade against unbelievers in a wise, just and meritorious way.[37]

As we understand from this quotation, the revelations treat a series of aspects of the regal power. Moreover, with Birgitta's passionate attention to detail, the advice she gives becomes highly persuasive. Birgitta's style is, in general, marked by an exceptional realism, rich in images and metaphors from daily life and from every dimension of human experience. Indeed, the metaphors become even more striking when placed within the political framework of Book VIII.[38]

Who, then, is Birgitta's ideal king? From whence originates his power, and what are the limits of his jurisdiction? By raising these questions, we are moving into the realm of political theory. We do not, perhaps, find any systematic political philosophy in Birgitta's *Revelations* in the same way that we find it in texts by other late medieval thinkers, such as *De regimine principum* (*c.* 1277–80) by Giles of Rome, the aforementioned *De potestate regia et papali* of John of Paris, Dante's *Monarchia*, or *Defensor pacis* by Marsilius of Padua. Still, Birgitta's texts uncover a deep familiarity with some significant intellectual traditions, and she has clear ideas regarding state affairs. Of equal importance is that her revelations in themselves are significant polemical interventions in the contemporary political debates, and especially debates concerning the authority of the pope and of secular rulers.

As mentioned above, the balance between the temporal and spiritual power, which had been the ideal since late antiquity, was heavily disturbed during the Avignon papacy. A series of conflicts between the papacy and secular

37 ES: 8.11–14: "qualem habitum et quibus diebus reges coronam debeant apportare ac eciam qualem morigerosam vitam deuotam et honestam debeant reges facere qualesque regine vxores eorem esse debeant, quales homines reges ipsi in consiliarios sibi assumant et teneant et quales a se remoueant et expellant, qualiter milites creare et nobiles ac eciam subditos et plebeyos tractare debeant, qualiter sua regna regant et rem publicam promoueant et eam zelando tenera compassione custodiant, qualiter passagium et guerras contra infideles discreto ac iusto et meritorio modo faciant."

38 In her study, *Birgitta och böckerna. En undersökning av den heliga Birgittas källor* (Stockholm: 1966), Birgit Klockars has analysed the prolific use of metaphors in Birgitta's *Revelations.* Moreover, as Janken Myrdal has discussed, the many parables in Birgitta's texts give modern readers invaluable access to everyday life in both Sweden and Italy in the 14th century. See Janken Myrdal, "The Revelations of Saint Birgitta and Everyday Life in the Fourteenth Century," in *Saint Birgitta, Syon and Vadstena: Papers from a Symposium in Stockholm, 4–6 October 2007*, eds. Claes Gejrot, Sara Risberg, and Mia Åkestam (Stockholm: 2010), 231–46.

rulers apparently had come to haunt the High Middle Ages, reaching a peak during the Investiture Controversy (1075–1122). Nevertheless, leading theologians, such as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, returned to Pope Gelasius's doctrines from the 5th century, in which the emperors and kings, popes, and bishops had distinct spheres of authority.[39] Their motive was, as the historian Sophia Menache has noticed, obviously to neutralize the more radical positions in both papalistic and anti-papalistic camps.[40] With Pope Boniface VIII's bull *Unam sanctam*, though, and the subsequent claims issued by the popes in Avignon about the pope's "fullness of power" (*plenitudo potestatis*), the balance was once again greatly disturbed, and this time more seriously than ever before.

5 The Ideal King

Birgitta's revelations, and above all those revelations gathered in Book VIII, may be regarded as attempts to calm tempers. Despite her sometimes quite violent and apocalyptic rhetoric, one of her aims was obviously to encourage the pope and the European monarchs to restore mutual respect.

In Birgitta's opinion, the ideal king is an instrument of God, as is the pope. In accordance with Augustine's political theology, she claims that the establishment of secular rulers is a consequence of the Fall. As Christ explains in Rev. VIII: 3:

> Because man refused to obey God, man must obey a man like himself. Again, because a king is appointed by God to judge and govern with justice, it is right for the king to be honored and respected by his subjects. Therefore, in order that a king might stand out among others, he should have finer, more distinguished and more distinguishing apparel than other persons. The honor of a king lies in exercising justice and

39 A classical study of Pope Gelasius I and the emergence of the of caesaropapism in the 5th century is be found in Walter Ullmann's book *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages* (London: 1955), 14–28. For studies of the influence of the Gelasian theory in shaping the theoretical foundations of the returning political crisis in the Middle Ages, see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J.: 1997 [1957]), 456–57; Michael Wilks, *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, U.K.: 1964), 303–9; Sophia Menache, "The Gelasian Theory from a Communication Perspective: Development and Decline," in *Revista de Historia* 13 (2012): 57–76.

40 Menache, "The Gelasian Theory," 68.

> judgment, and so it is to the honor of people to have a fine-looking and distinguished king. This is why a king has permission to wear distinguished and distinguishing apparel and, when he wears them, he should not take pride in his privilege but be humble in consideration of the burden of his office.[41]

The passage conveys a series of hallmarks that characterize the ideal king. Although humankind was created perfect (as we also may read in Rev. VIII: 48), in the image and likeness of God, the ambitious desire of Adam and Eve to be as wise as God led to the Fall. The installment of the kingdom may thus be regarded as a punishment of human pride, as it also was in the tradition of Augustine. However, in contrast to Augustine, and more in accordance with late medieval thinkers like Thomas Aquinas and Dante, who had a far more positive view on secular rulers, the king had a divine mission. In Birgitta's opinion, the king was appointed by God, and his duty was, on the one hand, to transfer God's justice to his subjects, and thus, on the other, to help his subjects attain salvation.

Because of his elevated position as a selected tool of God, the king should, according to Birgitta, look well in his attire. It is striking to see the great care she takes to assign weight to the king's appearance and customs. She not only describes the occasions for which he should wear a crown (on all the Christian feast days), and the quality and elegance of his clothes, but in Rev. VIII: 4 she also gives advice, ten pieces in all, about his daily behavior and his rule of others. For instance, the king should always sit at the table with some of his subjects. After his meals he should stay for a while in decent enjoyment and humble conversation with his household. In this way he gets the opportunity to listen to a variety of opinions and to receive important advice. Moreover, the king should be merciful and just in all his actions and judicial decisions. Things that need to be delegated should be delegated to the best men, selected by the king himself. He should always make inquiries regarding how law and justice are being followed in his kingdom, and likewise, he should look inward and scrutinize his own judgements and actions. He should "rely on the advice of

41 Rev. VIII: 3.1–3: "Quia homo contempsit obedire Deo, ideo necesse est, ut obediat homini simili sibi. Et quia rex a Deo constituitur ad iudicandum et regendum iuste, ideo dignum est, ut honoretur et timeatur a subditis. Ergo, ut rex discernatur ab aliis, necesse est ut habitum discretum et honestum et honorabilem habeat pre aliis. Quia sicut honor regis est iusticia et iudicium, sic honor plebis est pulchritudo regis et honestas eius. Propterea permittitur regi habitus honorabilis et honestus, quem cum portauerit non superbiat ex permissione set humiliet se considerando onus officii sui."

wise, experienced and God-fearing men"[42] and "beware of levity in his words and moral conduct."[43]

The most important thing for a king, according to Birgitta, is that he acts as a good Christian. As she explains: "The goal is to become such a king as to be respected by the young, honored by the old, praised by the wise, loved by the just, and longed for in the hearts of the oppressed."[44] This cannot be achieved, though, without two final pieces of advice, which touch on the very heart of the Christian experience: the king should celebrate the communion, but not with those people who were excommunicated by the Church. In this regard he should respect the decision of the clergy but at the same time try to bring the condemned back to the fold of the Church "by his charitable words and admonitions."[45] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the Christian command of charity: The king should simply "love the common citizens of his kingdom."[46] Birgitta's ideal king is, in other words, a Christian prince, and in several revelations she stresses the close bonds between the monarch and the Catholic Church. Appointed by God, the king's mission was to protect the Church, as she clearly presents it in Rev. VIII: 30 (the same as Rev. VI: 26). With the counsel of spiritual and wise men, he should repair the walls of Jerusalem, that is, restore the Catholic Church, which were about to collapse. In other revelations she discusses the complex question of knighthood, the *miles*, whose task was to defend the Church with their arms. Even the king belonged to the *miles*, according to Birgitta, as he had taken the oath of obeying God and protecting the Church against its enemies (Rev. VIII: 47.46).

In the following revelation (Rev. VIII: 48), Birgitta describes the fundamental trait of the king, not only as a knight but also as a servant of God. He is depicted as a friend of Mary (*amicus*) as well as her servant. On this occasion the Latin concepts of *famulus* and *servus* are used, both of which mean "servant." As Hans Torben Gilkær has noted, the terms *servus*, *famulus*, and *amicus/inimicus* are indeed repeatedly adopted throughout *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges* (Rev. VIII: 1, 19, 20, 30, 42, 57, and 58).[47]

The notion of the king as a servant of God probably had its roots in Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom. 13), in which he explains that all authority has its origin in God. The rulers are thus servants of God and act on his demand by

42 Rev. VIII: 4.14: "Innitatur eciam consiliis sapientum et expertorum et timencium Deum."

43 Rev. VIII: 4.15: "caueat leuitatem verborum et morum in omnibus."

44 Rev. VIII: 4.16: "Nam talem conuenit esse regem, quod timeatur a iuuenibus, honoretur a senibus, laudetur a sapientibus, diligatur a iustis et ab oppressis cordialiter desideretur."

45 Rev. VIII: 4.17: "verbis et ammonicionibus caritaiuis."

46 Rev. VIII: 4.19: "populum et communitatem regni sui diligat."

47 Gilkær, *The Political Ideas of St. Birgitta*, 108 and 167, n. 51.

bringing punishment and justice to his subjects. In *De civitate Dei* the idea of the king as servant is discussed regarding the two kinds of love which, according to Augustine, dominated the earthly city and the city of God, respectively.[48] In contrast to the earthly city, in which the lust for domination enrages its inhabitants, the heavenly city is dominated by the citizens' desire to serve each other in love—the rulers by their counsel, the subjects by obedience. The notion of the king as servant had classical roots as well. The image of Emperor Augustus as a humble and hard-working servant for his people, as described by Suetonius in his *De vita caesarum*, was, for instance, highly popular in the 14th century. Dante in his *Monarchia* (I, 16, 1) referred to Suetonius' story about Divus Augustus, as did Petrarch in the famous letter (*Disperse* 8) written to Cola di Rienzo during the revolution in Rome in the late 1340s.[49] In both cases, the secular ruler's success is described as depending on his capacity to understand the *limits* of his power. Only by comprehending his position as *servus* will he be able to be a just ruler.

For Birgitta, the ideal king also is characterized by the limits of his power. She does not describe him as a *vicarius Christi*, a term that sometimes was connected to secular rulers in the early Middle Ages.[50] In Birgitta's texts the term *vicarius Christi* is only reserved for the pope, which also was common in contemporary political discourse. In Rev. VIII: 23 (same as Rev. VII: 19), addressed to the people of Cyprus, Birgitta presents the idea of all Christians gathered in one Church, namely the Roman one. Moreover, she argues that the faithful, including the inhabitants of Cyprus, should have as their spiritual pastor Christ's "only vicar general in the world, that is, the Roman pontiff."[51] Similarly, in Rev. VIII: 51 and 52, the pope is again described as *vicarius Christi*. As Christ explains here: "He holds supreme power who sits on my seat in the world and has the power of binding and loosing in my name."[52] However, in contrast to the eager defenders of the hierocratic model encapsulated in Pope Boniface VIII's bull *Unam sanctam*, and further developed by the Avignon popes in their claim to absolute power, papal power was not unlimited, according to Birgitta.

48 Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: 1984), Book XIV, Ch. 29.

49 I have discussed the term *servus* in my book as it appears in these two texts by Dante and Petrarch. See Falkeid, *The Avignon Papacy Contested*, 39–41 and 95–120.

50 For a more detailed analysis of the aspect of the kingly rule as *rex vicarius Christi* in the Middle Ages, see Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 87–97.

51 Rev. VIII: 23.33/Rev. VII: 19.33: "unumque solum vicarium meum generalem in mundo, videlicet summum Romanum pontificem."

52 Rev. VIII: 52.2: "Ille enim est summe potestatis, qui in sede mea sedens in mundo potestatem habet ligandi et soluendi nomine meo."

Neither the pope's nor the king's jurisdiction was infinite. Their authority had admittedly divine origin, as the term *vicarius* conveyed, but at the same time both the pope and the king were nothing but servants.

The first letter of *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges* (Rev. VIII: 1) clearly maps out the distribution of power between the two authorities, as well as the legitimacy of each authority. In Rev. VIII: 1, Christ is described as the supreme Emperor, and he addresses the kings of the world:

> I had two excellent servants. One was a priest, the other a layman. The first was my apostle Peter who had a priestly office. The second was apostle Paul who was, as it were, a layman … See what great love I had for these two! I gave the keys of heaven to Peter so that whatever he bound or loosed on earth might be bound or loosed in heaven. I allowed Paul to become like Peter in glory and honor. It should be clear that, as they were equals and partners together on earth, so now they are partners in everlasting glory in heaven and glorified together.[53]

The opening letter may be a patchwork of texts selected from different revelations and orchestrated by Alfonso of Jaén, as Gilkær, among other scholars, has argued.[54] Still, there is no doubt that the letter repeats the viewpoints that also may be found in other parts of Birgitta's *oeuvre*, and this particular quotation restates, in fact, more or less word for word, a paragraph from Rev. II: 7. Of great importance is that Birgitta here avoids any connotations to the body politic used by the contemporary hierocrats and the defenders of the pope's supremacy. As Boniface VIII had argued in *Unam sanctam*, a two-headed body of Christians would indeed be monstrous. On the other hand, an unlimited jurisdiction, of either the secular ruler or the pope, would turn the subjects into slaves. These and other arguments were part of the common political discussions during the 14th century. Birgitta's solution to the contemporary crisis between ecclesiastic and secular rulers was a return to the harmony of the Gelasian model.

Both the pope's and the king's authorities are restricted by a supreme power, Birgitta argues, namely Christ. They are both *optimus famulus*—excellent servants—of the heavenly Emperor. Moreover, their power is restricted by each

53 Rev. VIII: 1.26–30: "Ego auem habui duos optimos famulos. Vnus eorum erat clericus et alter laicus. Primus erat Petrus apostolus meus clerici officium habens. Secundus fuit apostolus Paulus quasi laicus … Ecce, qualem caritatem cum istis duobus feci! Nam Petro dedi claues regni celorum, ut quecumque ligaret et solueret in terra ligata et soluta essent in celis. Paulo vero dedi, ut similis Petro fieret in gloria et honore."

54 Gilkær, *The Political Ideas of St. Birgitta*, 98.

other's limited realms of dominion: while jurisdiction over terrestrial matters belongs to the followers of Paul, that is, to the secular rulers, the spiritual matters in terms of humans' salvation are under the jurisdiction of the followers of Peter, that is, the pope. Christ had, in other words, arranged for the world to be ruled by a double power, and not by one, as the bull *Unam sanctam* declared.

6 Conclusion

Birgitta of Sweden is not usually offered any position in the canon of medieval political thought. She is, for instance, totally ignored in central works, such as *The Foundation of Modern Political Thought* (1978) by Quentin Skinner, *The Ideas of Power in the Late Middle Ages* (1996) by Joseph Canning, and *A History of Political Thought: From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance* (2000) by Janet Coleman. It may indeed be difficult to find a clear political theory in Birgitta's *Revelations*. Likewise, medieval women's prophetic or mystical speeches easily fall out of our modern and somewhat narrow-minded definitions of what a political thinker and philosopher is. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to suggest that Birgitta's writings and her arguments are not informed by a consistent thought, or, maybe better yet, by a coherent political theology. Scattered throughout Birgitta's voluminous *Revelations*, as this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, are a series of political considerations. The revelations demonstrate the author's insight into, and often first-hand knowledge of, the complex struggles between the Church, the nobility, and the European monarchies in the later Middle Ages. Moreover, they often reveal a surprising familiarity with long traditions of political and theological ideas. From Birgitta's practical and intellectual experience arise notions that led to her arguments and advice to contemporary kings and popes. Consequently, in the prophetic discourse we discover an underlying set of ideas that make Birgitta's *Revelations* a significant text in European political thought.

As we have seen, Birgitta was not alone in the efforts to reconcile and restore the previous balance between the secular and ecclesiastic authorities. Similar ideas are found in the writings of other contemporary thinkers as well. However, few fought with greater eagerness than Birgitta did, both for the restoration of Rome as the political, institutional, and religious center of Christianity, and for a thorough reformation of the Church. Birgitta played an active role in debates regarding secular governments both in Sweden and in Europe. To underestimate or dismiss her authority in these matters would give a profoundly inaccurate picture of the political landscape of 14th-century Europe. Moreover, Alfonso of Jaén and other leading figures, such as Emperor

Charles IV and Queen Johanna of Naples, who both petitioned the pope for Birgitta's canonization, considered the political aspects of her visions so important that they presumably would influence the outcome of the Great Western Schism. The *Revelations* were, in other words, considered a powerful *oeuvre* by contemporary thinkers and key persons. Likewise, the legacy of her work—the numerous manuscripts and many printed editions that circulated in Europe in the following centuries—reveals Birgitta's extraordinary impact. The long afterlife of Birgitta's literary corpus has not been discussed in this chapter. In the future, however, we may expect a series of such studies, which will elevate the status of Birgitta as a political thinker and alter our understanding of female political discourse in early modern Europe.

CHAPTER 4

Challenging and Championing St Birgitta's *Revelations* at the Councils of Constance and Basel

Anna Fredriksson

Challenges and championing have been constant companions to Birgitta Birgersdotter's revelations throughout their history, from the first response to Birgitta's visions by her contemporaries, through the examinations of her *Revelations* made during her canonization process and the assessments of the text's status in later centuries, to the theological and scholarly discussions in modern times. The present chapter will focus on evaluations of the *Revelations* at the church councils of Constance (1414–18) and Basel (1431–49), and the circumstances leading up to these.[1]

The first evaluation of, or rather apology for, the divine origin of Birgitta's visions was made shortly after her calling vision in the 1340s, by Birgitta's confessor Master Mathias, canon of Linköping Cathedral.[2] His text, *Stupor et mirabilia* ("Stupendous and wonderful things"), was the first contribution to the topic of *discretio spirituum* applied to the case of Birgitta's revelations, and also the first claim to their divine authority.[3] Alongside Mathias's evaluation, there were examinations of some of the revelations already during Birgitta's lifetime. One of these was carried out by an assembly of bishops while Birgitta lived in Sweden, and, according to her canonization proceedings, another was completed after she moved to Rome.[4] As is well known, Birgitta continuously communicated her visions for the rest of her life, orally or by letters, and these often contained harsh rebukes of the behavior of those she spoke or wrote to.[5]

1 This research was made possible thanks to generous grants from The Lars Hiertas Minnesfond.

2 Regarding Master Mathias, see Anders Piltz, "Mathias of Linköping," in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 6, col. 404.

3 The text is generally referred to as "Master Mathias's Prologue" and has continuously been published together with Birgitta's *Revelations*, Book I, the latest edition being that of Carl-Gustaf Undhagen (Rev. I). See Prol. M., with Undhagen's "Special Introduction" to the text on 38–50.

4 Undhagen, "Special Introduction"; AP, 100 and 562–63.

5 Instances are recorded in AP, 100, 313, 429–31, 492–93, 512, 562–63. The *Revelations* themselves, the *vita*, and the *legenda* offer much material on the topic of critiques against Birgitta; however, these texts are partly propagandistic, see Rev. VI: 90 and 92; AP, 638; AASS, Oct.,

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This implies that the revelations were known to many already during Birgitta's lifetime, and probably also disliked by some. Thus, the authority of Birgitta's visions had been appraised and most certainly also challenged long before her canonization process was initiated, following her death, in 1373—and long before the compilation and publication of the written work, the *Revelations*, in 1380.[6]

In the course of the canonization process, the bulk of Birgitta's recorded visions were assembled into a written corpus to be used as documents in support of her case.[7] The editor of the *Revelations* was Birgitta's friend and supporter Alfonso of Jaén. In his redaction, Alfonso included Master Mathias's *Stupor et mirabilia* as a prologue to the corpus; and he also wrote an apology of his own, known as *Epistola solitarii ad reges* ("The Hermit's Letter to Kings").[8] This text was added as a prologue to the eighth and last book of revelations in his edition. Referring to the doubts some had about the divine origin of Birgitta's revelations, Alfonso introduced in this prologue what he called "a brief method to discern divine visions from the evil illusions of Satan."[9] He then applied this method to the visions of Birgitta.

Together with these two supportive texts, the *Revelations* were presented to the pope and examined by at least two separate papal commissions, the first in 1377 during the papacy of Gregory XI, and the second under Urban VI, *c*. 1378.[10]

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vol. 4: 532–35; Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: 2001), Ch. 5.

6 In the canonization acts (AP, 98 and 638), however, it is stated that the *Revelations* had been kept secret until Alfonso of Jaén began the process of editing them. Regarding the publication of the work, see n. 12 below.

7 Regarding the redactions of the revelations and their role in the canonization process, see Undhagen, "General Introduction," in Rev. I: 4–37, esp. 16 and 25–26; and Arne Jönsson (ed.), *Alfonso of Jaén: His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi* (Lund: 1989), 54–108, esp. 67–69.

8 For studies of the *Epistola solitarii*, see Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén*, with a critical edition of the text on 115–66 (re-edited in 2002 in Rev. VIII: 48–81). See also Eric Colledge, "*Epistola solitarii ad reges*: Alphonse of Pecha as Organizer of Birgittine and Urbanist Propaganda," *Mediaeval Studies* 18 (1956): 19–49; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 173–76; Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbridge: 1999), 79–93; Roger Ellis, "Text and Controversy: In Defense of St Birgitta of Sweden," in *Text and Controversy from Wyclif to Bale: Essays in Honor of Anne Hudson*, eds. Helen Barr and Ann M. Hutchison (Turnhout: 2005), 313–17.

9 ES: 1.7: "Intendo eciam vos et alios incautando scribere et scribendo docere modum brevem discernendi visiones diuinas ab illusionibus pessimis Sathane." My translation.

10 Torvald Höjer, *Studier i Vadstena klosters och birgittinordens historia intill midten af 1400-talet* (Uppsala: 1905), 101–19, 65–71; Höjer notes (114–17) that the canonization proceedings of 1390 may have included new examinations of the *Revelations*; see also Otfried Krafft, *Papsturkunde und Heiligsprechung: die päpstliche Kanonisationen vom Mittelalter bis zur Reformation; ein Handbuch* (Cologne: 2005), 864–67. On approval of various

In addition to Alfonso, who was himself a part of both these commissions, other members wrote reports sympathetic to Birgitta within their examinations.[11] In 1380 the *Revelations* were approved to be copied, and we may thus consider the work to have been made public; at the time, it is said, numerous manuscripts were produced for prominent recipients within and beyond Italy.[12] The canonization of Birgitta, however, was not realized until more than a decade later, in 1391, by Boniface IX.[13] During the intervening period, several voices were raised, some challenging the canonization as well as Birgitta's *Revelations*, others defending them both.[14] One of the critics was the theologian Henry of Langenstein (1325–97), who in 1381 publicly questioned the plans to add

redactions of the *Regula Salvatoris*, see Roger Ellis in "The Visionary and the Canon Lawyers: Papal and other Revisions to the Regula Salvatoris of St Bridget of Sweden," in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge, U.K.: 1996), 75–76.

11 Regarding the other members of the commissions, see Höjer, *Studier*, 65–66. About the proposition for canonization presented by Matthew of Cracow, see Claire L. Sahlin, "Matthew of Kraków as a Leading Proponent of Birgittine Spirituality: The Discernment of Spirits in His 'propositio' for Birgitta's Canonization," *Birgittiana* 9, no. 17 (2004): 67–79. The propositions made by Johannes de Basilea, *Proposiciones pro canonizatione Beatae Birgittae*, exist, to my knowledge, only in manuscript form, in one copy in Uppsala University Library (UUB), C 15, fols 112r–131v: see Anna Fredriksson Adman, "Elva försvarare av den heliga Birgittas uppenbarelser," in *Dicit scriptura. Studier i C-samlingen tillägnade Monica Hedlund*, ed Sara Risberg (Stockholm: 2006), 70–71. Regarding Adam Easton's writing in defense of Birgitta's *Revelations*, see James Hogg, "Cardinal Easton's Letter to the Abbess and Community of Vadstena," in *Studies in St. Birgitta and the Brigittine Order*, vol. 2, ed. James Hogg (Lewiston, N.Y.: 1993), 20–26.

12 Undhagen, "General Introduction," 25–26; Höjer, *Studier*, 110. See also Chapter 7 in the present volume.

13 The bull is printed in AASS, Oct., vol. 4: 468–72, and in many editions of the *Revelations*: see, for example, Boniface IX, "Bulla canonizationis S. Birgittae de Regno Suetiae," in *Revelationes cœlestes seraphicæ matris s. Birgittæ Suecæ …*, ed. Simon Hörmann (Munich: 1680), fol. b v–b 4.

14 Höjer, *Studier*, 115–16. Contemporary testimonies of opposition during the canonization process include the text by Henry of Langenstein (1381) discussed here and the testimony of Laurentius Romanus, who refers to events taking place during the last months before the canonization in October 1391. (Regarding this text, see Karl Henrik Karlsson, "Lars Romares berättelse om den heliga Birgittas kanonisering," *Samlaren* 22 [1901]: 1–15.) See also André Vauchez, *La sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge* (Paris: 1981), 97 and n. 75. The *defensorium* of Adam Easton, probably written 1382/3–89, responds to a pamphlet critical of Birgitta's *Regula Salvatoris* (see Hogg, "Cardinal Easton's Letter"). Other evidence is found in a letter written *c.* 1384–91 by Magnus Petri, general confessor of Vadstena monastery, edited in Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, "Une source de prologue (Chap. 1) aux Révélations de Sainte Brigitte par le Cardinal Jean de Turrecremata," *Eranos* 58 (1960): 214–26; and Alfonso of Jaén's *Epistola* (written *c.* 1373–79), which constitutes a reply to unnamed doubters of the divine origin of the *Revelations*; see, for example, ES: 4.1–2.

Birgitta of Sweden and Charles of Brittany to what he considered to be an already too-long list of saints.[15] The eventual canonization of Birgitta did not put an end to the discussion regarding the authority of her revelations and her sanctity. For, although the *Revelations* would have made up the bulk of the documentation for the canonization process, Pope Boniface only touched briefly upon the subject of Birgitta's claimed divine inspiration in the canonization bull, and he offered no explicit statement regarding the authority of the *Revelations*.[16]

Disputes regarding the authority of Birgitta's *Revelations* were part of a greater issue within the Church, namely, so-called private revelations. Visions and revelations were an established and accepted part of Christian traditions; they were believed to be one way in which God communicated with mankind.[17] But visions were also deemed to be a way for the devil to deceive humans and to disseminate false messages among them. In the course of the 14th century, more and more people claimed to receive divine visions, many of them women.[18] This growing number made some members of the Church react with suspicion. Also, the Bible itself calls for the need to "test the spirits"

15 Henry of Langenstein (Henricus de Hassia), *Concilium pacis de unione ac reformatione ecclesiae*, in *Magnum et universale concilium Constantiense*, ed. Hermann von der Hardt (Helmstedt: 1697–1700), vol. 2, cols 2–61, c. XIIX.

16 Bonifacius IX, *Bulla canonizationis S. Birgittae*, b 3: "Quibus quidem sanctis, & absque intermissione continuatis operibus haec generosa Vidua per gratiam sancti spiritus promeruit multis eorum cogitationes & affectiones intimas, & gesta secretissima propalare, & visiones ac revelationes varias videre, & audire. Ac spiritu prophetico multa praedicere, quorum nonnulla effectu completa fuere, prout haec, & alia in ejus Revelationum Volumine plenissimè describuntur" ("Because she kept on with these saintly deeds incessantly this high-born widow has, by the grace of the holy spirit, deserved to disclose to many their own thoughts and their innermost affections and most secret deeds, and to see and hear various visions and revelations and to foretell in a prophetic spirit many things, of which many were fulfilled, just as this and other things are described thoroughly in her book of Revelations").

17 See Chapter 2 by Anders Piltz in the present volume and Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: 2017).

18 Several monographs dedicated to the theme of female visionary claims in the Middle Ages have been published in recent decades, such as Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices* (see esp. 34–40); Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: 2003); and Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: 2004); see also Wendy Love Anderson, "Gerson's Stance on Women," in *A Companion to Jean Gerson*, ed. Brian Patrick McGuire (Leiden: 2006), 293–315. André Vauchez, in *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, trans. Margery J. Schneider, ed. Daniel E. Bornstein (Notre Dame, Ind.: 1993), 219–36, claims that Birgitta is the starting point for this phenomenon.

(*probate spiritus*) to see if they are true or false.[19] While Scripture provides only a few basic instructions on how to conduct such a test, various criteria for the discernment of spirits are listed in the writings of several early theologians. But these instructions were neither fully nor easily applicable in daily practice. For this reason, individual cases were treated in different ways and ad hoc solutions abounded.

Varying views on private revelations were to some extent accepted within the Church.[20] And revelations and prophecies were regularly used as tools by ecclesiastical and secular leaders alike toward political ends.[21] If new alleged messages from God could challenge existing doctrine, regulations, and agreements, this naturally meant that visions and revelations were a potential breeding ground for conflicts.

The study of the challenging and championing of Birgitta's *Revelations* in Constance and Basel can, as part of this bigger issue, offer insight into how the Church's eventual official view on private revelations developed in connection with discussions regarding the authority and inspiration of Birgitta's visions. Documents resulting from the two councils display a wide variety of thoughts and arguments expressed by theologians on the subject of private revelations in the Middle Ages generally—arguments that reoccur in discussions on this matter later in history. In addition, the criticism and defenses presented at the councils are worthy of study because of their impact on the later reputation and use of Birgitta's *Revelations* within the Church, something that especially affected the activities of the expanding so-called Birgittine Order.[22] For these reasons, the 15th-century debates on the *Revelations* corpus have previously attracted the interest of scholars from several disciplines,

19 This is proclaimed in 1 John 4:1. For a summary of the research history on the discernment of spirits and definitions, see Wendy Love Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages* (Tübingen: 2011); Cornelius Roth, *Discretio spirituum: Kriterien geistlicher Unterscheidung bei Johannes Gerson* (Würzburg: 2001), 30–60; Günter Switek, "Discretio spirituum," *Theologie und Philosophie* 47 (1972): 36–76; Bernard McGinn, "Visions and Critiques of Visions in Thirteenth-Century Mysticism," in *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, ed. Elliot R. Wolfson (New York: 1999), 87–112.

20 Knut B. Westman, *Birgitta-studier I* (Uppsala: 1911), 280, which cites Auguste Poulain, *Des grâces d'oraison* (Paris: 1922), 315f.; Isabel Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca, N.Y.: 2000), 1–10.

21 Colledge, "*Epistola Solitarii*," 40; Vauchez, *The Laity*, 220–21; F.R. Johnston, "English Defenders of St. Bridget," in *Studies in St Birgitta and the Birgittine Order* (Lewiston, N.Y.: 1993), vol. 1: 263–75, at 271; Roth, *Discretio spirituum*, 189–90; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 168.

22 On the reactions of the Birgittine Order to the evaluation of the *Revelations* at the councils, especially of Basel, see Chapter 6 by Roger Andersson in the present volume.

including literature, theology, Church history, religious studies, women's history, and gender studies.

1 Jean Gerson and Birgitta's *Revelations* at the Council of Constance

Some twenty-five years after her canonization, Birgitta's holiness became a subject of attention at the Council of Constance, initiated in 1414.[23] One of the Birgittine missions at the council was to obtain a confirmation of the canonization bull promulgated by Boniface, most likely because of uncertainty within the Church regarding the validity of bulls issued during the Schism.[24] Pope John XXIII apparently provided such a confirmation within the first months of the council, in February 1415.[25] A few months later, however, the pontiff was deposed without any immediate successor, and in August of the same year a treatise called *De probatione spirituum*, "On the testing of spirits" (hereafter *DPS*), was published at the council.[26] The text was written by Jean Gerson (1363–1429), the chancellor of the University of Paris and author of numerous theological treatises.[27] In this work, Gerson refers to the Church's duty to test

23 The following section is based, in large part, on research reported in my article "The Council of Constance, Jean Gerson, and St. Birgitta's *Revelationes*," *Mediaeval Studies* 76 (2014): 217–39.

24 Höjer, *Studier*, 162–65; Beata Losman, *Norden och reformkoncilierna 1408–1449* (Gothenburg: 1970), 18–49 (esp. 35–37); Krafft, *Papsturkunde*, 907–19.

25 Ulrichs of Richenthals (also known as Ulrich Reichental, and von Richental) *Chronik des Constanzer Concils 1414 bis 1418*, ed. M.R. Buck (Tübingen: 1882), 53–54. "An unßer frowen aubent zů liechtmeß, [that is, 1 February, the eve of the feast of the Purification] do man [zalt] von gottes geburt MCCCCXV jar, do ward ain gantze session … und ward da canonisiert, das ist zů ainem hailgen gemacht, mit rechter urtail und mit gemainen rechten." The reliability of this source, and the notion that the act described was actually an act of canonization, is questioned by Krafft, *Papsturkunde*, 907–14.

26 Jean Gerson, "De probatione spirituum," in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Palémon Glorieux (Paris: 1960–73), vol. 9: 177–85. See the discussion regarding the date in André Combes, *Essai sur la critique de Ruysbroeck par Gerson*, vol. 1 (Paris: 1945), 297–329. On Gerson's "publishing" at the council, see Daniel Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity Before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning* (Philadelphia: 2009), esp. chapters 6 and 7. See further the following section and notes 35 and 36 below.

27 The many scholarly studies on Jean Gerson and his works include recent examples such as Roth, *Discretio spirituum*; Brian Patrick McGuire, *Jean Gerson and the Last Medieval Reformation* (University Park, Pa.: 2005); McGuire, *A Companion to Jean Gerson*; Marc Vial, *Jean Gerson: théoricien de la théologie mystique* (Paris: 2006); Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity Before Print*.

the spirits.[28] In his discussion of the ways by which this can be done, he brings up the case of Birgitta, stating that it was desired, or intended, to discuss "the canonization of saints and the examination of their doctrines" at the Council.[29] It is problematic, Gerson points out, both to approve and to denounce visions—especially if they are already accepted as divine by some.[30] Later in the same treatise he discusses canonizations and then refers to Henry of Langenstein's text of 1381, which questioned the plans to canonize Birgitta. However, Gerson does not mention Birgitta's name in this passage in his own text.[31]

De probatione spirituum, and more specifically the passages that seem to imply that some people saw problems with Birgitta's *Revelations* and her canonization, has attracted much attention among Birgittine scholars, with Gerson's status as one of the 15th century's most influential writers on the discernment of spirits contributing to this interest.[32] These researchers often refer to Gerson's *DPS* as "Gerson's criticism" or "examination," or even an "attack" on Birgitta, her canonization, and/or her *Revelations* at the Council of Constance. And expanding these "attacks" to include more persons than Gerson has become a prominent feature of later literature, with claims that the canonization of Birgitta and/or her *Revelations* were criticized, discussed, and/or examined at the council.[33] However, a closer look at the first-hand sources reveals little evidence of a collective questioning of Birgitta's canonization or of the *Revelations* at the council. In fact, investigations indicate that the only source contemporary with the council that explicitly mentions any problem regarding Birgitta's *Revelations* is Gerson's *DPS*.[34] Concerning the canonization alone, there is no contemporary evidence at all of any direct criticism. Some

28 Gerson had also published an earlier treatise on the discernment of spirits in 1400–01; see "De distinctione verarum revelationum a falsis," *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Glorieux (Paris: 1960–73) vol. 3: 36–56.

29 Gerson, *DPS*, §5 (179): For a full quotation, literal translation, and discussion of this passage, see the following section.

30 Gerson, *DPS*, §5 (179); also §8 (181) from the line "Hinc alia ratio sumitur."

31 Gerson, *DPS*, §8 (181): Referring to the notion that it is vain to heap revelation upon revelation ("visiones super visiones in immensum multiplicatas") so that everything becomes "more" he concludes: "Hinc clarae memoriae magister Henricus de Hassia comprimendam esse tot hominum canonizationem scripsit" ("It is therefore that the well-reputed master Henricus de Hassia wrote that the canonization of so many people should be constricted").

32 On Jean Gerson and *Discretio spirituum*, see Roth, *Discretio spirituum*, 25–29 with references.

33 This tradition and literature will be discussed below.

34 See Fredriksson, "The Council." In this discussion, I have excluded the Birgittine documents related to the mission of getting the Birgittine rule approved of in a certain form at the Council of Constance.

scholars claim that Gerson, because of his reference to Henry of Langenstein's text, meant that Birgitta's canonization was superfluous. However, that cannot be known, as what Gerson refers to is indeed Henry's view on overabundant canonization in general.

On the issue of Birgitta's *Revelations*, most literature on the topic connects Gerson's writing of *DPS* to an alleged conflict regarding the *Revelations*. But again, a look at the source material in question reveals that the immediate circumstances of and motives for Gerson's writing and publishing of *DPS* are virtually unknown.[35] The only information referred to in later literature is *DPS* itself, a colophon to early printed editions of the text, and what would probably be a rubric to manuscript copies of the text.[36] The colophon and the rubric are most likely secondary and possibly conjectural (but nevertheless much cited).[37] Thus, the only reliable source pertaining to the writing of *DPS* remains *DPS* itself; and it is also the only evidence of any challenges to Birgitta at Constance. In the text, Gerson questions the *Revelations*, without referring to any other criticism of them at the council. What does he say, then, explicitly? According to André Combes, *DPS* was most probably published on 3 August 1415.[38] It would have been at that time that, as Gerson claims in his text, discussions regarding canonization of saints and the examination of their doctrines were considered at the council:

> About these things[39] I have found not just one treatise written by one person, but many treatises written by many various persons, which

35 There is an entry in the Council's *Fasti* edited in the late 17th century that records the publication of *DPS*, but nothing is said here about the circumstances of its publication; see von der Hardt, *Magnum et universale concilium*, vol. 4: 32. In the same volume, on p. 10, von der Hardt also comments on the fact that there is no full and integral *Acta* of the first parts of the council, but only a "*Compendium*" described as "*exile*" ("short" or "meager"), which was composed twenty years after the council.

36 The colophon was included in the editions of Cologne (1483), Strasbourg (1488 and 1514), and Nuremberg (1498), and in the influential edition of Ellies du Pin of Antwerp (1706). It states that *De probatione spirituum* was "*editus propter aliqua, quae de Canonizatione Brigittae, in praefato Concilio oriebantur*" ("written because of matters that arose regarding the canonization of St Birgitta at the said Council"). The colophon exists in at least one manuscript used by du Pin: Paris, Bibl. Mazarin 939, which contains a 15th-century collection of copies of the works of Gerson.

37 My arguments for the text in the colophon and the rubric being secondary and conjectural are given in Fredriksson, "The Council," 227–28.

38 Combes, *Essai*, 327–28.

39 According to what precedes, "these things" would refer to "testing of spirits." For the whole section, see below on Colledge's paraphrase.

> material[40] I wish it was granted me to have at hand, and to study carefully now that it is desired in this Sacred Council to discuss the canonization of saints and the examination of their doctrines, especially of one of them,[41] who is called Birgitta, who was used to having visions which she claimed to have received divinely not only from angels, but from Christ and Mary and Agnes and other saints, in a united intimacy, as a bridegroom talks to his bride.[42]

Many translations and interpretations of the passage exist, some of which are questionable. A sentence of crucial importance in the passage is "*dum in hoc sacro Concilio quaeritur tractari de canonizatione sanctorum, et examinatione doctrinarum suarum*" ("now that it is desired in this Sacred Council to discuss the canonization of saints and the examination of their doctrines"). The first English translation of the text, by Paschal Boland, is often cited, with this passage used as evidence that debates were taking place at the council there and then, as Boland translates "*quaeritur tractari*" as "are being discussed."[43] However, I contend that "*quaeritur tractari*" represents the future tense, "it is desired" or "it is intended to discuss," and that Gerson is clearly writing about discussions that have not yet taken place. Based on this reading, I would argue that we cannot know with certainty if any discussions of these matters ever took place at the Council of Constance. Furthermore, the use of the impersonal "*quaeritur*" ("it is desired") makes it unsettled who "desires" to discuss these matters. For all we know, it could be just Gerson himself.

Regarding the same passage, I maintain that the paraphrase given by Eric Colledge, in his much-quoted article on Alfonso of Jaén's *Epistola Solitarii*,

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40 The Glorieux edition (*Œuvres complètes*, vol. 9: 177–85), which I quote here, reads "quod," whereas the du Pin edition (*Joannis Gersonii … Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, book 1 [Antwerp: 1706], 38–43) reads "quos." The pronoun in both versions refers to "the treatises."

41 The interpretation of "de canonizatione sanctorum, et examinatione doctrinarum suarum, praesertim unius quae Brigitta nominatur" has been discussed by Combes (*Essai*, 305), and I will return to it below.

42 *DPS*, §5 (179): "Qua super re nedum unum et ab uno, sed plures a diversis tractatus compositos invenimus, quod utinam manualiter habere nunc fas esset, et diligenter inspicere dum in hoc sacro Concilio quaeritur tractari de canonizatione sanctorum, et examinatione doctrinarum suarum, praesertim unius quae Brigitta nominatur, assueta visionibus quas nedum ab angelis, sed a Christo et Maria et Agnete et caeteris sanctis, familiaritate jugi, sicut sponsus ad sponsam loquitur, se asserit divinitus suscepisse."

43 Paschal Boland, *The Concept of Discretio Spirituum in Johannes Gerson's "De Probatione Spirituum" and "De Distinctione Verarum Visionum a Falsis"* (The Catholic University of America Studies in Sacred Theology, 2nd ser.) 112 (Washington, D.C.: 1959), 28 §10: "during the Sacred Council in which the canonization of saints and the examination of their teachings *are being discussed*." Italics added.

similarly alters the sense of Gerson's text.[44] According to Colledge, Gerson stated in this passage that there existed a "multitude of conflicting testimonies now in the hands of the Council, and especially in the case of Bridget." However, the lines paraphrased as "a multitude of conflicting testimonies," (*nedum unum et ab uno, sed plures a diversis tractatus compositos*) ought to be rendered as "not just one treatise written by one person, but many treatises written by various persons." That is, no conflict is described in that passage. Additionally, Colledge's paraphrase omits several lines, giving the impression that these many treatises all pertained to Birgitta, when they did not. When we look at the whole passage it is obvious that the treatises regarded "the discernment of spirits."[45]

A second crucial point concerns the subject of the desired discussion: "the canonization of saints and the examination of their doctrines." Note that Gerson does not state that it was desired at the council to *conduct* an examination of doctrines (and especially Birgitta's), but that there was an interest in *discussing* the examination of doctrines (*quaeritur tractari de canonizatione sanctorum et examinatione doctrinarum suarum*), and especially Birgitta's. The preposition "*de*" and the two nouns in the ablative make this clear. The word "examination" could very well refer to an intended future investigation, but it refers more likely to an action already carried out, that is, the discussion would concern previous examinations of St Birgitta's *Revelations*. At least two such investigations would most probably have been available at the council: the supportive texts of Alfonso of Jaén and Master Mathias, which were included in the *Revelations* in their edited form.[46] These evaluations would thus have been available to Gerson, too, although we cannot know for certain that he ever read them. I propose that what Gerson wanted to discuss at the council, apart from the canonization of saints, were previous examinations of the doctrines of saints (and especially Birgitta's), or, rather, how such investigations should be conducted properly. Such a reading fits well with the overall purpose

44 Colledge, "*Epistola Solitarii*," 45.

45 *DPS*, 179 § 5: "Probare spiritus si ex Deo sunt ex primo modo … contingit multipliciter et sufficienter quantum ad praesentem spectat materiam, et ad statum communem viatorum. Qua super re nedum unum et ab uno …" ("To test if the spirits are of God by the first method … can be done in many ways and sufficiently in so far that it concerns the matter at hand and the common state of the travelers. About these things I have found not just one treatise written by one person …").

46 Doubtlessly, the Birgittines brought them there as an argument for the confirmation of Birgitta's canonization. There is also a reference to Birgitta's revelations in Ulrich of Richenthal's *Chronik*, 53.

of *DPS*, where Gerson expresses his disapproval of previous appraisal methods and outlines a new method.[47]

In the centuries that followed, some writers mentioned St Birgitta as one of the topics of the Council of Constance.[48] These theologians of the early 1500s provide no first-hand sources, and only one of them mentions a conflict: Ambrosius Catharinus (1484–1553), who claims that the *Revelations* were "approved of and commended at the Council of Constance, yes even in a *judicium contradictionis*."[49] This term seems to refer to some kind of judicial proceedings, or perhaps just a debate with a certain outcome. It could also be that with this *judicium* Ambrosius refers to the judicial proceedings at Basel, where the *Revelations* were accused and defended as part of a judicial process at the council. Thus, it is not clear if the reference about the judicial proceedings pertains to Constance, and we do not know of any source for Ambrosius's statement, which he made over a hundred years after the council. This somewhat lessens the weight of this source. Even so, his remark is worth taking into consideration.

2 Hermann von der Hardt's *Acta*

As argued thus far, among the sources cited in the discourse I have found no solid documentation of challenges to Birgitta, her canonization, and her *Revelations* at the Council of Constance beyond Gerson's *DPS*. Nonetheless, in the 18th century claims surfaced that there were "some matters" regarding Birgitta at the council. Besides *DPS*, its colophon, and its rubric, it appears that the

47 This interpretation is also consistent with the interpretation of this *DPS* passage by Combes, *Essai*, 305. In his review, Combes suggests that it was not Birgitta's canonization that was discussed, but the approbation of her doctrine. Colledge suggests that *DPS* is a reaction to an examination of Alfonso's report; see Colledge, "*Epistola Solitarii*," 45–46, and below in this chapter.

48 Simon Hörmann, in his edition of the *Revelations* (Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelationes caelestes seraphicae Matris S. Birgittae* (Munich: 1680) (fol. d 2), cites Antonius Corduba (1485–1578) and Alphonsus Mendoza (d. 1591), who state that the *Revelations* were approved at the Council of Constance and again after that council. On this testimony, see Fredriksson, "The Council," 228–29.

49 Ambrosius Catharinus, as cited by Hörmann, *Revelationes caelestes*, fol. d 2 v: "Quis ausit B. Birgittae Revelationes, aut esse phantasticas, aut ab Angelo Sathane inspiratas obijcere, quae tamen in Constans. Concilio, etiam in Judicio contradictionis probatae, ac commendatae fuerunt" ("Who shall dare to charge B. Birgitta's Revelations of being either products of fantasy, or inspired by the angel Satan, as they were approved of, and commended at the Council of Constance, yes even in a *judicium contradictionis*").

main source for this narrative was the *Acta* of the council compiled by the 18th-centry German historian Hermann von der Hardt.[50]

In his large collection, von der Hardt mentions Birgitta's canonization and *Revelations* on several occasions, but the statements made there are often contradictory or presented in a variety of contexts.[51] In one version of the story of the circumstances of Gerson writing his *DPS* (in Tome III), von der Hardt asserts that Gerson did so in connection to what the historian calls "a little quarrel" regarding Birgitta at the council.[52] In another account of the writing of *DPS* (in Tome IV), he does not mention a controversy regarding St Birgitta at all, but he links the text to a Swedish delegation's petition for the canonization of three countrymen.[53] As von der Hardt describes it here, Gerson was part of an examining committee appointed to give its opinion on the petition, and, as a part of his preparations for this particular investigation, he wrote *DPS*.

Although the information furnished by von der Hardt in his *Acta* is at once both resolute and confusing, it is significant that he never describes an actual examination of Birgitta's *Revelations* at the council. Additionally, although he repeatedly notes doubts, quarrels, discussion, and controversy regarding other people's visions as well as Birgitta's *Revelations*, the only supporting material offered is Gerson's *DPS*, which, as noted above, mentions no debates regarding Birgitta actually having taken place, nor does it provide claims that the council conducted examinations of her *Revelations*. That leaves us, even after the publication of the Council's *Acta*, with no reference to any other medieval source evidencing any challenge to Birgitta's *Revelations* beyond *DPS*.

Concerning the petition for canonization of the three Swedes, von der Hardt notes that Gerson and the rest of the examination committee responded to the petition by calling for the collection and presentation of further documentation and proof regarding the holy conduct of the three Swedes, before any canonization of them could be considered. Von der Hardt confirms the account

50 Von der Hardt, *Magnum et universale*. Here, von der Hardt uses the rather vague term "*res*," "matters," in two of his rubrics: "*De Brigittae, Svecanae, … rebus Constantiensibus*" (vol. 3: 15); "About the matters regarding Birgitta of Sweden at Constance," "*De rebus Brigittae*," "About the matters regarding Birgitta," (vol. 3: 28), perhaps an echo of the equally vague colophon of early *DPS* editions, "*editus propter aliqua, quae … oriebantur*" ("because of matters that arose").

51 A thorough examination of von der Hardt's entries regarding Birgitta is offered in Fredriksson, "The Council," 229–35.

52 Von der Hardt, *Magnum et universale*, vol. 3: 28, and vol. 3: 15.

53 Von der Hardt, *Magnum et universale*, vol. 4: 490, and vol. 4, cols 706–707. This case is described in Losman, *Norden*, 26–28, and in Anders Fröjmark, "The Canonization Process of Brynolf Algotsson," in *Procès de canonisation au Moyen Âge—Medieval Canonization Processes*, ed. Gábor Klaniczay (Rome: 2004), 87–100, esp. 88–90.

citing *DPS* and other original documents, one of which is extant today.[54] As a result of this response at the council, a special commission conducted a second round of collecting material in Sweden, the result of which is partly extant in manuscripts. This material also includes a reference to Birgitta's *Revelations*.[55] In fact, the *Revelations* was quoted as support of the holiness of one of the Swedish candidates, Bishop Brynolf of Skara.[56] It is possible that this quotation and reference were included already in the first documentation regarding the three Swedes, i.e. the documentation in advocacy of Brynolf read by Jean Gerson and the other members of the council's committee.[57] If so, this may have prompted Gerson to react to the faith in the *Revelations* as well as in other "insufficiently" examined revelations. In referring to Henry of Langenstein's statement about the overabundant canonization of saints, he could very well have had the new canonization petition regarding the three Swedes in mind.[58]

To sum up, even though von der Hardt does not cite any source contemporary with the Council of Constance that comments negatively on Birgitta other than *DPS*, such sources and discussions could of course have existed,[59] as indicated by not only von der Hardt's text, but also the colophon and the note by Antonius Catharinus mentioned above.[60] In this connection, we should also remember that we know there was opposition to Birgitta's canonization also before it was granted in 1391. Pope John XXIII's deposition would have

54 Stockholm, the Swedish National Archives, letter of 27 April 1416, see *Svenskt diplomatarium från och med år 1401*, ed. Carl Silfverstolpe, D. 3 (Stockholm: 1885–1902) no. 2224, p. 138. The letter is quoted *in extenso* by von der Hardt, vol. 4: 708–15.

55 The canonization acts of Brynolf were edited by Claes Annerstedt in *Scriptores rerum Svecicarum medii aevi* (Uppsala: 1871–76), vol. 3: 2, 138–85; see esp. 176–79.

56 Losman, *Norden*, 28; Fröjmark, "The Canonization Process," 92–93.

57 The letter of 27 April 1416 states that that commission "saw and examined" material that consisted of "authentic letters, as well as books and official documents" ("literis autenticis necnon libellis et instrumentis publicis"), in *Svenskt diplomatarium*, D. 3, no. 2224, p. 138. Fröjmark in "The Canonization Process," 90, estimates this material not to have been especially extensive.

58 Again, this interpretation is consistent with the construal of this *DPS* passage by Combes, *Essai*, 305, cited above.

59 Among the sources mentioned by von der Hardt in the "Prolegomena" to his *Acta* (vol. 4: 10–12) is the "Epitome" or "Compendium" put together at the Council of Basel in 1442. A valuable account of the sources available to von der Hardt and Lenfant exists in Jacques Lenfant's (or L'Enfant) "Preface" to his *Histoire du Concile* (Amsterdam: 1714), XXI-XLIV.

60 Daniel Hobbins (in "The Council of Basel and Distribution Patterns of the Works of Jean Gerson," in *Religious Controversy in Europe, 1378–1536: Textual Transmission and Networks of Readership*, eds. Michael Van Dussen and Pavel Soukup [Turnhout: 2013], 137–70, at 137–38) points out that it is likely that there are many hitherto unrecorded manuscripts with texts by Gerson in libraries across Europe. Perhaps one of these carries more information on *DPS* than what is known to scholars today.

decreased the authority of his alleged confirmation of the canonization at the council. Whether there was a confirmation provided at the council or not,[61] both scenarios would have given fodder for discussion of Birgitta's canonization of 1391. Clearly, the Birgittines themselves were still insecure about the status of the canonization after the council, as they later sought yet another confirmation by Pope Martin V, in 1419. Therefore, von der Hardt's accounts should not be discarded, but it is important that we be aware of the problems of the tradition, and that he in order to support his own statements about Birgitta only cites *DPS*.

If, in fact, there were discussions, debates, or even examinations regarding Birgitta's *Revelations* at the Council of Constance, it is remarkable that it has not been possible to trace any obvious outcome of them.[62] Moreover, we have no evidence of a direct response, not even on the part of the Birgittines, to Gerson's text at the council, apart from the outcome of the case regarding the three Swedes.[63] The standpoints revealed in the committee's answer to the petition regarding the three Swedes resemble those proclaimed by Gerson in *DPS*. After the closing of the council, in 1419, Martin V confirmed the bull of Boniface IX from 1391.[64] In the confirmation bull, Pope Martin V made no new statements about the authority of the *Revelations*.

3 Literature Published after von der Hardt

The affairs in Constance involving Birgitta and Gerson were commented upon in two works published only a few years after von der Hardt's *Acta*.[65] One of them, Jacques Lenfant's *Histoire du Concile de Constance*, cites von der Hardt; however, Lenfant does not mention the connection between Birgitta and the

61 Krafft, *Papsturkunde*, 907–15, suggests that, in fact, there was no confirmation of the canonization at the council.

62 The lack of documentation is also recorded in AASS, Oct., vol. 4: 409.

63 Scholars have observed that Gerson's remarks regarding Birgitta were specifically left unattended to, see Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 309, with reference to André Vauchez. Documents may, of course, have been lost, but it also seems as if the Birgittines avoided mentioning this kind of critique in their documentation, if possible. See Anna Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo: Dyalogus super Reuelacionibus beate Birgitte. A Critical Edition with an Introduction* (Uppsala: 2003), 47–48. The *DPS* itself, however, appears to have been read by many, especially after the council. See Hobbins, who, in *Authorship and Publicity*, 195, remarks that the text can be found in an unusually large number of copies.

64 The bull was printed, among other places, in AASS, Oct., vol. 4: 476.

65 See Fredriksson, "The Council," 238–39.

writing of *DPS* that von der Hardt makes in his text.[66] Although Lenfant clearly knew about both versions of the story, he connects *DPS* only to the discussions regarding the petition for the canonization of the three Swedes. A second work is an edition of Gerson's collected writings published by Ellies du Pin, which includes a text on Gerson's life and works, the famous *Gersoniana*.[67] Here du Pin writes that Gerson, through the publication of *DPS*, appears to impugn Birgitta's canonization indirectly. Later in the piece he returns to *DPS*, which he notes to be on how to evaluate private revelations, adding that *DPS* was published "at the time when the canonization of St Birgitta was dealt with, who was used to having such visions, and with the examination of her teachings."[68] The first statement complies with what we know today about *DPS*, whereas the other alludes to discussions regarding Birgitta's canonization, which would, strangely enough have been going on six months after it was topical at the council. Du Pin does not cite von der Hardt; instead, he obviously bases his statements directly on *DPS*, and probably also on the colophon to the text.[69] Formally, however, the sources for du Pin's statements are unknown, and they can therefore, at this point, be regarded as only partially supported by first-hand sources contemporary with the council.

In the wake of Lenfant and du Pin, several scholars have commented on the "case" of Birgitta's canonization and revelations at the Council of Constance. However, this secondary literature has not proffered any new evidence regarding Birgitta and the council. I would argue that almost all references can be traced back to von der Hardt, or literature citing him, the colophon, or various interpretations and translations of *DPS*.[70] In some cases, generous interpretations and unconfirmed information were added. Thus, over the years,

66 Lenfant does not do that, even though he cites the exact place in the volume where von der Hardt makes these claims, i.e. in connection to von der Hardt's own edition of *DPS*, in vol. 3: 28; see Lenfant, *Histoire du Concile de Constance*, vol. 1: 307–10, and also vol. 1: 67–68, on the re-canonization of Birgitta in February 1415.

67 Ellies du Pin, *Gersoniana*, in Jean Gerson, *Joannis Gersonii … Opera Omnia*, ed. Ellies du Pin (Antwerp: 1706).

68 Ellies du Pin, *Gersoniana*, Lib. II, p. XXXV, and Lib. III, p. XLII: "…cum ageretur de Canonizatione S. Brigittae, quae huiusmodi visionibus assueta erat, et de examinatione doctrinae illius." This is clearly reminiscent of the topical passage in Gerson's *DPS*; see the full quote above, in which Gerson calls Birgitta *assueta visionibus*.

69 In his edition of Gerson's collected writings du Pin included *DPS* and the colophon, apparently copying an early printed copy or a manuscript of *DPS*.

70 Comments on Gerson's writing of *DPS* include that of Combes, *Essai*, 303–5; Palémon Glorieux, "La vie et les œuvres de Gerson. Essai chronologique," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 18 (1950–51), 181; Westman, *Birgitta-studier I*, 280–81; Höjer, *Studier*, 166; Losman, *Norden*, 36–37; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 162–66; Kari Elisabeth Børresen, "Birgitta's Godlanguage: Exemplary Intention, Inapplicable Content," in *Birgitta,*

secondary literature has shaped a scenario in which Birgitta's canonization or revelations were an official point of critical discussion, even subject to heated debate among learned men at the Council of Constance.[71] There are scholars who claim that examinations of her *Revelations* were conducted there; according to some, these were led by Gerson.[72] Confusion derives not only from the contradictory information provided by von der Hardt, but also the fact that the council's documents were edited long after the meeting had ended, and that the actual date of the publication of *DPS* was not established until the 1940s.[73]

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hendes værk og hendes klostre i Norden, ed. Tore Nyberg (Odense: 1991), 57; Elliott, *Proving Woman*, Ch. 6, and literature cited in the notes below.

71 Part of this tradition are the influential works by J. Buée in AASS, Oct., vol. 4: 409–10 and 475; C.J. Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte*, vol. 7 (Freiburg: 1869), 81; Colledge, "*Epistola Solitarii*," by his paraphrase of *DPS* on p. 45; Switek, "Discretio spirituum," 64; Josef Weismeyer, "Ein blick in einen ferner Spiegel: Spätmittelalterliche Traktate über die Unterscheidung der Geister," in *Gottes nähe: Religiöse Erfahrung in Mystik und Offenbarung*, ed. Paul Imhof (Würzburg: 1990), 119; F. Vandenbroucke, "Discernement des esprits," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité: ascétique et mystique; doctrine et histoire*, eds. Marcel Viller et al. (Paris: 1932–1995), vol. 3, col. 1264; Peter Dinzelbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen? Schicksale auffälliger Frauen in Mittelalter und Frühneuzeit* (Munich: 1995), 115; Roth, *Discretio spirituum*, 190, 193; Vauchez, *The Laity*, 249; Krafft, *Papsturkunde*, 914; Cordelia Heß, *Heilige machen im spätmittelalterlichen Ostseeraum. Die Kanonisationsprozesse von Birgitta von Schweden, Nikolaus von Linköping und Dorothea von Montau* (Berlin: 2008), 107; Johnston, "English Defenders," 268–69; Anette Creutzburg, *Die heilige Birgitta von Schweden. Bildliche Darstellungen und theologische Kontroversen im Vorfeld ihrer Kanonisation (1373–1391)* (Kiel: 2011), 60–61; and E.W. Kemp, who embellishes the tradition in his *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (London: 1948), 129–30. Kemp seems to have been unaware that the date of Birgitta's re-canonization and the publication date of *DPS* did not coincide; this is also true for Boland, *The Concept of Discretio Spirituum*, 19 and 25; John W. Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: 2006), 211; and Jo Ann McNamara, "The Rhetoric of Orthodoxy," in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, N.Y.: 1993), 25. Anderson in "Gerson's Stance," 304, stands out from the others, as she interprets Gerson's text as advising the Church *not* to discuss the *Revelations*.

72 James Hogg, "St Birgitta's *Revelationes* Reduced to a Book of Pious Instruction," in *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honor of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio*, ed. Anne Clark Bartlett (Cambridge, U.K.: 1995), 201–13 (esp. 203); J.B. Schwab, *Johannes Gerson: Professor der theologie …* (Würzburg: 1858), 366 and 364; André Vauchez, "Saint Bridget's Revelations in France at the End of the Middle Ages," in *Santa Brigida profeta dei tempi nuovi* (Rome: 1993), 179; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 302–3; Brian Patrick McGuire, "In Search of Jean Gerson: Chronology of his Life and Works" in McGuire, *A Companion to Jean Gerson*, 24.

73 Combes, *Essai*, 297–329.

4 Interpretations of Gerson's Reference to Birgitta

When considering studies on the topic of Birgitta's *Revelations* at the Council of Constance as a whole, it is clear that most of them do not concern events as they unfolded at the council, but instead the significance of Gerson's references to St Birgitta specifically in *DPS*, and Gerson's general view of the genuineness of Birgitta's *Revelations*.[74] And such analyses often include Gerson's other texts on the discernment of spirits.[75] Many scholars, as part of the prevailing tradition claiming that there were "attacks" on Birgitta's sanctity and her *Revelations* at the Council of Constance, have endeavored to determine what lay behind those criticisms. There are those who suggest that "the attacks" were a consequence of an antipathy towards the *Revelations* held by some within the Church.[76] Kari Elisabeth Børresen suggests that Birgitta, her canonization, and/or the *Revelations* were used as weapons in the ongoing strife between conciliarists and papalists.[77] One group of academics explains the criticisms as a result of misogyny, or a wish to check visionary authority.[78] Several writers point to the strong standing of the University of Paris at the council, a portion of these referring to discussions regarding the *Revelations* conducted there already before the convening of the council.[79] Others attach importance to the

74 See Höjer, *Studier*, 166, 202; Westman, *Birgitta-studier 1*, 280–81; Losman, *Norden*, 36–37; Roth, *Discretio spirituum*, esp. 189–95; Anderson, "Gerson's Stance," 302–7; Johnston, "English Defenders," 269; Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 42, 55–56; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 162–68; Dyan Elliott, "Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (2002): 26–54; McGuire, *Jean Gerson*, 249–51; Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'?: The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80, no. 1 (2005): 37–41; Combes, *Essai*. See additionally Vauchez, *The Laity*, 251–52; Colledge, "*Epistola Solitarii*," 44–46; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 274–319; Anderson, *The Discernment*, 201 and 204–7.

75 Apart from *De discretione spirituum* (1415), Gerson had treated the subject once before in his *De distinctione verarum visionum a falsis* (1401–02) and returned to it later in *De examinatione doctrinarum* (1423). Gerson occasionally touches upon the subject in other texts, too.

76 Regarding this view, see the comments in Höjer, *Studier*, 166, 201–2; and Carl Silfverstolpe, "Om kyrkans angrepp mot Revelationes Sanctae Birgittae," in *Kungl. Vitterhets- Historie- och Antikvitets Akademiens Handlingar* 32, 4 (Stockholm: 1895), 13–15, 22–29.

77 Børresen, "Birgitta's Godlanguage," 57.

78 See Anderson, "Gerson's Stance," 304; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 162–67; Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 43–44; Elliott, "Seeing Double"; Elliott, *Proving Woman*, Ch. 6; Dinzelbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen?* 115; McGinn, "Visions and Critiques," 87–112; and also Jo Ann McNamara, "The Rhetoric," 25.

79 James H. Wylie, *The Council of Constance to the Death of Johannes Hus* (London: 1900), 51–52, although without references to relevant sources; cf. Vauchez, "Saint Bridget's Revelations," 179–82; and Fredriksson Adman, "Elva försvarare," 66–68.

conflict between France and England, and the meddling of Birgitta's *Revelations* in it.[80]

5 The Council of Basel and the Proceedings Regarding Birgitta's *Revelations*[81]

Around twenty years after the publication of Gerson's *DPS*, the *Revelations* were officially scrutinized at the Council of Basel, convoked in 1431. The examinations appear to have arisen from a controversy between the Chapter of Lübeck and the Birgittines of the nearby monastery of Marienwohlde.[82] The disagreement concerned Marienwohlde's claim to the indulgences *ad instar*, which had been withdrawn by a papal decision but were nevertheless proclaimed by the monks of the monastery.[83] By 1433, the dispute had become a case for the jurisdiction of the council. Within this body, cases of dispute were handled by one of the four deputations: faith, peace, reformation, or the general deputation. On 6 April 1434, the matter was in the hands of the deputation of faith, and a later document summarizing the state of affairs up to that date describes a fully developed legal process over matters of faith between the members of the monastery of Marienwohlde and Nicolaus Amici, the council's *procurator fidei* and the representative of the University of Paris.[84] The document states that

80 See, for instance, Vauchez, "Saint Bridget's Revelations," 179–80; Colledge, "*Epistola Solitarii*," 31–33; 45; Johnston, "English Defenders," 268–69; Dinzelbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen?* 282; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 168; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 302, 310; Elliott, "Seeing Double," esp. 33. Such a motif was suggested by the Birgittines themselves in a letter dated to 1416 (Stockholm, Riksarkivet, A 26, fol. 127).

81 The following section is based in large part on research reported in my Ph.D. dissertation: Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*.

82 Höjer, *Studier*, 175–76, 184–86, 202–6. See also Silfverstolpe, "Om kyrkans angrepp," 11–12; Westman, *Birgitta-studier I*, 281–82; Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 17–18.

83 That this issue was central to the examination is supported by the final judgement of the proceedings, of which one part regards the indulgences of the order. "Ad instar" refer to indulgences given by minor churches that were allowed to dispense the indulgences of major churches. The most important indulgences *ad instar* of the Birgittines were the St Petri ad vincula and Portiuncula indulgences, that is, indulgences that belong to the two more significant shrines located in Italy. All indulgences *ad instar* had been revoked by Pope Boniface IX in 1402. The last confirmation of the revocation was made on 27 September 1425. The Birgittines nevertheless considered themselves excluded from the revocation.

84 The document, part of Sweden's National Archives collection of parchment letters, was issued two years after the proceedings they describe, on 23 March 1436. This is the fullest attested description of the course of events from these proceedings that is known. An

at an earlier stage in the proceedings, the Birgittines of Marienwohlde had presented the *Revelations* as an argument in the case. The judge in matters of faith, Juan Cervantes, had then responded by appointing a commission to examine the *Revelations*.[85] The document does not make clear why the *Revelations* were reviewed. Torvald Höjer proposes that the reason lay with the Birgittines' insistence that their indulgences were granted to them in the *Revelations* by God, thus providing grounds for disobeying the papal withdrawal of the indulgences.[86] The judge would then need to establish if, in fact, God was the source of the *Revelations*.[87]

By 6 April 1434, the appointed commission (here called "the first") had already concluded its examinations.[88] The results, summed up in a collection of passages copied from the *Revelations*, were presented on that day to Judge Cervantes, on the demand of Nicolaus Amici as *procurator fidei*. Although not stated explicitly, the copied selection of passages in the document, as well as evidence in other sources, indicates that the work of the first commission aimed at scrutinizing the orthodoxy of the *Revelations*.[89]

Today, this collection of extractions from the *Revelations* can be found in different versions, including the document cited here. The number of excerpts differs in the various versions,[90] but in secondary literature they are generally referred to as "the 123 extracted articles."[91] These articles were originally most probably accompanied by critical comments by those who made the

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edition and translation of the first part of the document is available in Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 19–20, 62.

85 According to the document of 23 March 1436, the examining commission consisted of Matthias Döring, Bernardus Serra, and Henricus de Diist.

86 In Rev. IV: 137, Jesus grants the Birgittine Order its indulgences. Members of the order had previously used this passage in support of their right to their indulgences. See Höjer, *Studier*, 176 and n. 1, 206.

87 As suggested by Silfverstolpe, "Om kyrkans angrepp," 32. Cf. *Concilium Basiliense*, vol. 5, eds. G. Beckmann, R. Wackernagel, and G. Coggiola (Basel: 1904), 123.

88 The numbering of this and the following groups of examiners, here called "commissions," is mine, and made for the sake of clarity.

89 In the reports of subsequent commissions (see below), wordings such as "suspecti de heresi et errore," "absoni," "dubii in fide veritatis revelate," and the like were used, and these reports also include answers to accusations of adherence to Arrian, Waldensian, and Wycliffite teachings. See also *Concilium Basiliense*, vol. 5: 123.

90 The cited document, Parchment letter of 23 March 1436, contains the largest number of extracted passages.

91 This is due to the form in which they appear in a later defense of them written by the theologian Johannes de Turre Cremata; see below. For a brief summary of the theological issues they concerned, see Höjer, *Studier*, 207.

selections, explaining why a certain article was suspect.[92] Such comments, be they originally written down or oral, are quoted, referenced, and paraphrased in documents produced at the council at later stages of the proceedings.[93] Other texts, as well as written or oral rumors, critical of Birgitta and her *Revelations* seem also to have circulated at the council.[94] Birgittine chronicles describe the situation on or around 6 April 1434 as a heated and even hostile debate, and claim that rumors and criticism originated with one or several of the members of the first commission.[95] It would also be clear to anyone reading the extracted articles in the copies and quotations in which they are found, that the first commission, in doing the excerpting, often misquoted the *Revelations*, and it likewise took sections out of context, combining them with other extracted passages, thereby imbuing them with meanings not originally there. The flawed rendering of the text was noted already when the first commission handed in its report including the excerpts.[96] In reaction to the aggregate hostile activities thus described, contemporary writers referred to the critics' spokesman as *impugnator*, or *calumniator*, and to the group of the critics themselves as *adversarii* of the *Revelations*.[97] The Birgittines singled out Matthias Döring as the principal impugner.[98]

The document itself produced by the first commission, including the extracted articles, came to be the object of a new examination, and for a short time the matter was assigned to a second commission.[99] Finally, it ended up in

92 No original reports of the first commission have, to my knowledge, yet been found by modern scholars; but the uniform formulation of several comments in various texts indicates that they were originally recorded in writing. The greatest number of critical comments thus far unearthed are found in the reports of a subsequent, third commission, discussed below.

93 On the second and the third commissions, see below. A full compilation of the extractor's comments has as yet not been made. Points of accusations against the *Revelations* are listed in Uppsala, UUB, C 518, fols 8r–20v, "*Registrum*."

94 In Parchment letter of 23 March 1436, the collection of excerpts, or "the articles," are said to have been handed over to the judge "among other things they [i.e. Matthias Döring and his fellow commissioners] had extracted from the stated books." See also Heymericus de Campo, *Tractatus de probatione spirituum*, Prefacio (UUB, C 518, fol. 142r–v, see below), and a Birgittine account of the events in Basel, UUB, C 518, fols 3vb–4vb (ed. and trans. in Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 23–25, 63–64).

95 UUB, C 518, fols 3vb–4vb.

96 See below on the work of the third commission.

97 This could refer to the members of the first commission and other critics alike.

98 See UUB, C 518, fols 3vb–4vb.

99 This commission was set up on 11 May 1434, see *Concilium Basiliense,* vol. 3, ed. Johannes Haller (Basel: 1900), 95, l.21–28. See also Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 25–26. No documents that are still extant today have been identified with certainty as originating from examinations made by this second commission.

the hands of a third commission. This third commission appears to have been at work during 1435, and its task was to study the extracted articles and the *Revelations* together,[100] including the first commission's distorted rendering of the *Revelations*.[101] If we are to judge from their reports, the members of the third commission appear to have set their minds to defending the *Revelations* at all cost, and are thus commonly called the "defenders" or "champions" of Birgitta's *Revelations*.[102] Of the four commissioners, the Spaniard Johannes de Turre Cremata (1388–1468) was the most famous in his time, as he later became cardinal; but the representative of the German nation, Heymericus de Campo (1395–1460), was also a renowned theologian.[103] The reports by Johannes de Turre Cremata,[104] Heymericus,[105] and the Gaul Johannes Roberti[106] address, in part, Birgitta's inspiration, that is, whether the *Revelations* are of God or not; and they all, including the Italian commissioner Ludovicus de Pirano (d. 1450), discuss specific articles drawn from the *Revelations*.[107] Referencing the Bible and other authoritative texts, they declare each article to be orthodox. Apart from his contribution to this commission, Heymericus was also engaged to conduct further investigations into the matter, regarding the argumentation of the first

100 The setting up of this commission and the members of it are not recorded in the council's acts. The reports of the commissioners constitute the evidence of its work. The members also described their work in their respective reports.

101 In their reports, the members of the third commission repeatedly and indignantly refer to the task of rectifying the extracted articles to bring them in accord with the original text of the *Revelations*, a task necessary for conducting their work.

102 It does not seem to have been a requirement to maintain neutrality; see, for example, the report of one of the members, Ludovicus de Pirano, in UUB, C 518, fol. 202vab.

103 The other two were Ludovicus de Pirano and Johannes Roberti Bonnaevallensis. For biographical notes on the four commissioners, see Fredriksson Adman, "Elva försvarare," 63–65.

104 The complete report of Johannes de Turre Cremata is found as yet in manuscript only, one copy being UUB, C 518, fols 23r–96r, where the text is called *Declaraciones pro defensione scriptorum Birgittae.* The defense comprises 123 articles. Chapters 1–4 of the prologue to his report, including a later preface from 1446, were printed in several editions of the *Revelations.* Chapter VI of Turre Cremata's *Prologus* to his defense, which includes the defense of 123 articles, was edited by J.D. Mansi and called *Defensiones*: Johannes de Turre Cremata, *Defensiones quorundam articulorum rubrorum Revelationum S. Brigittae factae* (…) in *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collection*, vol. 30 (Venetiis: 1792), cols 699–814.

105 Heymericus de Campo's main report explaining 80 articles is as yet unedited. One copy, including a preface written in 1446, is in UUB, C 518, fols 98r–140v, in the manuscripts catalogue called *Declarationes pro defensione scriptorum Birgittae*. Heymericus wrote many more texts on the topic; a review is given in Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, Ch. 3.2.

106 In his report, which is as yet unedited, Johannes Roberti explains 20 articles. One copy of the text, called *Declarationes pro defensione Revelationum Birgittae*, remains in UUB, C 518, fols 191v–202r.

107 Ludovicus's report on 29 articles exists as yet in manuscript only, one copy being UUB, C 518, fols 202r–210v, called *Declarationes pro defensione Revelationum Birgittae*.

commission.[108] This additional undertaking resulted in a set of texts later collected under the heading *Tractatus de probatione spirituum*.[109] A separate text, in the copies called *Auisamentum*, is commonly considered to have been written jointly by the four members of the third commission.[110] The judgement of the proceedings was most probably delivered on 1 March 1436, signed by Ludovicus of Arles, who was the judge in matters of faith at that time.[111] The contents of the judgement will be discussed below.

6 The Scholarly Discussion Regarding the Proceedings at the Council in Basel

Modern scholarship on the process against the Birgittines at the Council of Basel and the critical evaluation of Birgitta's *Revelations* there has focused largely on identifying why the *Revelations* were subjected to scrutiny in the first place.[112] The *Revelations* had already been examined regarding their orthodoxy and approved by two papal commissions prior to the Council of Constance. Moreover, Birgitta was a canonized saint. These circumstances have led scholars to suggest that the proceedings in Basel were a continuation of a growing discontent that had become manifest at Constance and even before that.[113] They point to some parties within the Church that, for different

108 Heymericus's additional examinations seem to have taken place after the ordinary work of the commission was completed; see Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 104 and n. 416.

109 Heymericus de Campo, *Tractatus de probatione spirituum*, UUB, C 518, fols 142r–178r. The last text in this collection, *Dyalogus super Reuelacionibus beate Birgitte*, was edited in Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 169–226.

110 The text was printed in Silfverstolpe, "Om kyrkans angrepp," 39–47; see also Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 28 and 42–43.

111 Höjer (*Studier*, 211) suggests the date 1 March 1436, on the basis of the date for the revocation of the indulgences. The judgement was, according to a copy of it, included in a bull dated 1 December 1436. Regarding this judgement and its validity, see Höjer, *Studier*, 210–14; Westman, *Birgitta-studier I*, 286–88; Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 29–33, esp. n. 90. The judgement was printed *in extenso* in Silfverstolpe, "Om kyrkans angrepp," 48–50; and in Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 65.

112 See Fredriksson Adman, "An Heretical Saint? The Brigittine Case and Heymericus de Campo at the Council of Basel," in *University, Council, City: Intellectual Culture on the Rhine (1300–1550)*, eds. Laurent Cesalli, Nadja Germann, and Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen (Turnhout: 2007), 279.

113 See Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte*, 81, 559–60; Höjer, *Studier*, 201–2; Knut B. Westman, "Om Birgittas orden; anteckningar med anledning af T. Höjer, Studier i Vadstena klosters och birgittinordens historia," in *Historisk Tidskrift* 26 (1906): 262–68; Westman, *Birgitta-studier I*,

reasons, disliked Birgitta's personality, her *Revelations*, and the claims of the Birgittines. Thus they presume that the proceedings and debates in Basel regarding the Marienwohlde indulgences provided this opposition an opportunity to launch an attack on the *Revelations*, which indeed formed the basis of the existence of the Birgittine Order.[114] As noted above, there had been reactions against the *Revelations* continuously until 1415, when Gerson published his *DPS*. During the years between this publication and the Council of Basel there is evidence of open disapproval of the Birgittines in several medieval sources. This disapproval partly concerned the order's indulgences, and partly the Birgittines' claims regarding the *Revelations* and other things that did not fully conform with existing tradition or regulation within the Church.[115] Little is known about this opposition, nor is it known *if* or *how* the antagonists may have collaborated to form a joint assault, or if such an assault had any impact on the proceedings in Basel.

7 The Main Issues of the Discussion Regarding Birgitta's *Revelations*

As was made clear in the discussion above, the main purpose of the documents produced in Basel regarding the *Revelations*, like those of Master Mathias and Alfonso of Jaén, was to establish whether the *Revelations* could be of God or not. The various texts therefore often include attempts to define how this can be proved, and are thus contributions to the medieval discourse on the discernment of spirits. Deducing from quotations in the defenders' reports, the members of the first commission in Basel addressed several points of discontent with the *Revelations*; these correspond to the most commonly used criteria for discernment. One important criterion was that a message from God could not contain any untruths, half-truths, or utterances that were not in accordance with Scripture, because such inclusions would make them deceptive messages, signs that the

277–89; Vauchez, *The Laity*, 249; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, Ch. 5 and 6; Barbara Newman in "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'?" 38; Børresen, "Birgitta's Godlanguage," 57. See additionally Ingvar Fogelqvist, *Apostasy and Reform in the Revelations of St. Birgitta* (Stockholm: 1993), 242–46.

114 The rule of the order was originally one of Birgitta's revelations, and the indulgences, also granted to the order in a revelation, were vital to the economy of the order.

115 The leaders of the motherhouse of the Birgittines in Vadstena were aware of the risks concomitant with the behavior of some members of the daughter houses, but they seem to have been unable to check it; see Höjer, *Studier*, 175–77, 212. About the Birgittine claim that the *Revelations* had the same authority as the Gospels, see Westman, *Birgitta-studier I*, 286–87 and n. 1.

Devil or human imagination were the source of the visions. Most of the passages extracted from the *Revelations* were evidently selected on the grounds that they were considered to fall into these categories. At the same time, the extracts and the first commission's comments to them concerned diverse theological issues, many of which were part of the theological debate of the day.[116] They also include accusations of adherence to specific heretical teachings,[117] and criticisms based on the argumentation and language.[118] Additional criteria served as the basis for singling out other sections, where it was argued, for example, that Birgitta was an unlikely receiver of divine messages—that she was subject to vanity or had some other personal disadvantage. The defenders in the third commission explained the extracted passages benevolently, claiming to know how they were meant to be understood and asserting that if read correctly the extracted passages were true and godly.[119]

The debates surrounding Birgitta's *Revelations* thus exemplify the sort of problems that could arise from private revelations within the Church in the late 1400s and early 1500s: the practical problems that arose from some people's complete faith in them, the problem that the public dissemination of their contents might constitute, and the question of their inspiration and authority. But even though many new texts on *discretio spirituum* were produced in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, those texts written on the authority of Birgitta's *Revelations* refer for the most part, explicitly or implicitly, to discussions of *discretio spirituum* from earlier times:[120] Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville, Origen, and Thomas Aquinas, but primarily Scripture itself.[121] And although modern scholars claim Gerson's text to be one of the most important of the Middle Ages on the theme of the discernment

116 An account of the recurrent themes of the articles is found in Höjer, *Studier*, 207; see also Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 106–9.

117 Replies to such accusations are found in Johannes de Turre Cremata's report (*Defensiones*, art. 21, 83, 99, and 118) and in Heymericus de Campo's, for example, art. 12, 16, and 21 in his *Opposiciones* (UUB, C 518, fol. 148v–152r).

118 Objects of criticism included exaggerated and obscure language in the *Revelations*. Even in the final judgement there is reference to "perplexitates et ineptitudines multarum conclusionum in ipsis positarum" ("perplexities and ineptitudes in many of the conclusions made there"). See Louis of Arles, *Sentencia contra ordinem nostrum in concilio Basiliensi lata*, ed. Fredriksson Adman in *Heymericus de Campo*, 65.

119 See, for example, passages cited in Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 106–9.

120 This observation is true for both DPS and as well as the defenses of Birgitta discussed in the present chapter.

121 See the clear and easily accessible summaries in McGinn, "Visions and Critiques," and Frank Tobin, "Medieval Thought on Visions and Its Resonance in Mechtild von Magdeburg's Flowing Light of the Godhead," in Bartlett, *Vox Mystica*, 41–53.

of spirits, it is referenced only once, as best as can be determined, in the mass of texts produced at the Council of Basel.[122] Nonetheless, the commissioners in Basel could have known of or been influenced by Gerson's text. The only way to verify this is to make a special study and comparison of the texts.

The debates on Birgitta's *Revelations* of the early 1400s do, however, mention and even discuss the supportive texts by Mathias of Linköping and Alfonso of Jaén in their capacity as earlier examinations of the *Revelations*.[123] Other texts commented on in the examination reports of the four defenders include the canonization bull of 1391 and the confirmation bull of 1419. These were accessible at the Council of Basel, at least in the later stages of the proceedings.[124]

As noted above, the original writings of the first commission, or of the critics in Basel, have not yet been identified. Thus, in the collection of texts discussing the authority of Birgitta's *Revelations* in the 14th and 15th centuries, there is, in fact, only one text officially published and preserved to our day that speaks negatively about Birgitta's *Revelations*: Gerson's *De probatione spirituum*.[125]

Apart from the texts resulting from the legal proceedings there, defenses of the *Revelations* were sent to the Council of Basel or written in connection with it.[126] The debate on the whole also includes the propositions and supportive texts written during the canonization proceedings, as well as apologies that

122 Gerson's "doctrine" is referred to in one part of Heymericus de Campo's *Probate spiritus* (UUB, C 518, fols 146v–148v). On this issue, see Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 309–12.

123 See Heymericus de Campo's *Probate spiritus* (UUB, C 518, fols 145r–148v) Johannes Roberti, *Declaraciones*, UUB, C 518, fols 193va, 194rb, and 195va; Johannes de Turre Cremata, *Prologus*, c. 1 (p. a3r/C); also the Birgittine account in UUB, C 31, fols 92r–94r. See also Colledge, "*Epistola Solitarii*," 48–49; Roth, *Discretio spirituum*, 190 and n. 106.

124 There are no signs of the accused Birgittines from Marienwohlde referring to these texts during the proceedings, nor can any reference to them be found in what is preserved of the argumentation of *Impugnator*. Johannes de Turre Cremata, Johannes Roberti, and Heymericus de Campo refer to both bulls, however, as well as to the canonization acts and to the pope's approval of the indulgences.

125 The critical texts previously mentioned in this chapter were critical of Birgitta's canonization, order, or members of the order.

126 Among the many defenses of Birgitta's *Revelations*, the following are the most probable to have been written in connection with the Council in Basel: The so-called "*Sollemnis declaracio*" of Bishop Reginald in UUB, C 518 (fols 294r–309v), called *Declaracio pro defensione Reuelacionum Birgitte*; see Fredriksson Adman, "Elva försvarare," 71–72; Galfridus de Bellaland's explanations of 28 *proposiciones*, see Fredriksson Adman, "Elva försvarare," 66–67; Johnston, "English Defenders," 166–68; Höjer, *Studier*, 208. A copy of this text is extant in UUB, C 518 fols 219r–231v. Another text possibly written around this time is by the unknown "Ignotus"; see Fredriksson Adman, "Elva försvarare," 65–66; and UUB, C 518 fols 211r–215v. Apart from these apologies, several supplications were made from supporters of the Birgittines, for example, the king of Sweden and bishops and prelates of Denmark; see AASS, Oct., vol. 4: 410.

have not yet been dated.[127] It is difficult to establish what role these played in the actual discussions and development of affairs in Basel and afterwards.

The members of the third commission in Basel added some final opinions to their reports. The four of them agreed that the *Revelations* should not be judged heretical[128]—Johannes de Turre Cremata argues that they could be admitted and read in church "in accordance with their modest and pious meaning,"[129] and Heymericus concludes that, as they had been found to be consonant with Catholic faith, they could not be condemned, but must be approved. In his opinion, they should be considered heavenly or divine.[130]

8 The Judgement of the Proceedings in Basel

The judgement of the proceedings in Basel, most probably pronounced on 1 March 1436, was directed at the monastery of Marienwohlde, but it was, of course, of great importance for the Birgittine Order as a whole, primarily its motherhouse in Vadstena, Sweden. The document consisted of five parts; these pertain to the Birgittine indulgences, the right of the Birgittines to hear confession, their rights regarding interdict, questions regarding the *Revelations*, and information about punishment in cases of disobedience to the decision. Concerning the indulgences, the judgement states in sharp words that the Birgittines of the Marienwold monastery had no right to proclaim their indulgences that had been withdrawn by papal decree. On the subject of the *Revelations*, the judge did not fully approve of either the contents or the title of the books, that is, *Libri diuinarum seu celestium Reuelacionum sancte Birgitte* ("The books of St Birgitta's divine or heavenly revelations"). More specifically, he forbade

127 Canonization propositions by Johannes de Basilea and Matthew of Krakow are preserved still, as is Adam Easton's defense of some passages in *Regula Salvatoris* (Hogg, "Cardinal Easton's Letter"), the text of Magnus Petri (Undhagen, "Une source"), and the apology of the so-called anonymous Franciscan friar (Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 192–212). As for the apology of the so-called Doctor angelicus (UUB, C518, fols 232r–246v), see Johnston, "English Defenders," 268 and Fredriksson Adman, "Elva försvarare," 66–68.

128 Johannes Roberti, *Declaraciones*, UUB, C 518, fols 194va–195va; Ludovicus de Pirano, *Declaraciones*, UUB, C 518, fol. 210.

129 Johannes de Turre Cremata, *Defensiones*, art. 123, in the end (col. 813 B-C and col. 814 A-B) "iuxta eorum modestam et piam intelligenciam." Furthermore, Johannes suggests they be admitted and read in the same manner as many other theologians' books and saints' legends are permitted to be read. See also Heymericus de Campo, *Probate spiritus,* arg. 1 (UUB, C 518, fol. 143r).

130 Many of Heymericus's shorter reports end in a concluding remark. Thus, there are many final opinions by him regarding various subquestions. See Heymericus de Campo, *Declaraciones*, *Resoluciones* 14:1 (UUB, C 518, fol. 137ra); *Declaraciones, Final opinion* (UUB, C 518, fols 136ra–137ra); Heymericus de Campo, *Dyalogus*, Appendix §11.

the public proclamation or dissemination of the unclear contents in their present form without a Catholic modification, and he forbade equating the authority of the book with the authority of the Gospels.[131] However, the verdict does not claim that the *Revelations* are illusory or heretical. Instead, it is stressed that St Birgitta is to be held in the same reverence as before. Compliance with the judgement was to be enforced by, among others, the Chapter of Lübeck.

Obviously, the verdict provided no solution to the general problem of private revelations. Rather, it added the case of Birgitta to the series of temporary solutions, and the complication of the restricted use of the *Revelations* was left to the Birgittines to handle themselves. Opinions differ as to whether the judgement should be seen as a victory or a defeat for the defenders, and there has also been a debate among modern scholars regarding the extent to which earlier discussions about the *Revelations* had an impact on the judge's decision.[132] Although Knut B. Westman considers it a consequence of the judge's conciliarist sympathies, he points to the similarities in the stances of Judge Louis of Arles and Jean Gerson.[133]

The passage in the verdict that deals with the *Revelations* begins with the judge's statement that these books engendered doubt, hesitation, and suspicion among learned men. Obviously, he had that in mind when he made his restrictions regarding the use and dissemination of the texts.[134] However, the statement that the passages causing doubt could not be used "without a Catholic modification"[135] could be read as though they could be used *with* such a modification, thus indicating that less-experienced readers could be helped to rightly understand the difficult passages via an explanatory commentary.

The judgement was a crucial issue for the Birgittines, prompting them, in the decades that followed the Council of Basel, to expend much time and resources in attempts to have the decision withdrawn. At the same time, they devised strategies for complying with its demands while continuing to read and use the *Revelations*. Briefly, that strategy included using the defenses written

131 Louis of Arles, *Sentencia*.

132 The majority of scholars look upon the judgement as a defeat for the Birgittines. Others have pointed out that the judgement could be seen as an acquittal. See Tore Nyberg in *Dokumente und Untersuchungen zur inneren Geschichte der drei Birgittenklöster Bayerns 1420–1570* [1] (Munich: 1972), 39; and Westman, *Birgitta-studier 1*, 286–89. See also Colledge, "*Epistola solitarii*," 45.

133 Westman, *Birgitta-studier 1*, 279 and 286; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden,* 222.

134 Westman, *Birgitta-studier 1*, 287, suggests this reason; Heymericus de Campo takes a similar position in *Dyalogus* H 151.

135 "*Sine modificacione catholica*," Louis of Arles, *Sentencia*.

in Basel, chiefly that of Johannes de Turre Cremata, as the "Catholic modification" for which Louis of Arles indirectly asked.[136] It is still not settled whether the judgement was ever formally revoked during the 1400s, by papal decree or in some other manner.[137] Some scholars and even dictionaries state that it was revoked, thanks to the contributions of Johannes de Turre Cremata. Despite there being no documents to support this claim, his defense was undoubtedly of great importance for the use of the *Revelations*.[138] In any case, the effects of the judge's decree did not, at least in retrospect, last long. Already in the 1470s something decisive seems to have happened, making it possible for the Birgittines to make preparations for printing the whole of the *Revelations* corpus without a commentary. This project was realized in 1492 in Lübeck itself, where the book was printed in over 800 copies.[139]

The theological debate of the early 15th century regarding the authenticity of the *Revelations* and their authority within the Church echoes in the debates centuries later. A text considered the last word in this subsequent discourse is the theological treatise *De servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione*, ("About the beatification of God's servants and the canonization of the blessed"), written in the mid-1700s by Prospero Lambertini, later Pope Benedict XIV.[140] In discussing revelations such as Birgitta's, Lambertini quotes medieval theologians, including Jean Gerson and Johannes de Turre Cremata, as well as many post-medieval theologians. He notes that the approval of the *Revelations* made by Boniface IX was only "a permission to edit them for the benefit of the

136 Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 32–61.

137 Johannes Messenius, in his *Chronologia Sanctae Brigittae*, writes about a bull of Pope Nicholas V revoking the judgement; see the edition of this work by Ann-Mari Jönsson (Lund: 1988), 222, §218–19. This bull has not been identified by modern scholars. It should be noted that even though the Council of Basel was considered schismatic, the judgements it pronounced have never officially as a group been pronounced invalid. On this issue, see Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 32–33, 61, and nn. 208–9.

138 Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 38–39, 60–61. Some later literature claims that the defenders won the case for the Birgittines in Basel. See, for example, Stephan Lederer in *Der spanische Cardinal Johann von Torquemada, sein Leben und seine Schriften* (Freiburg im Breisgau: 1879), 77–78. In Durantes's edition of the *Revelations*, many of the cited authors claim that the *Revelations* were approved of at the Council of Basel. Some scholars state that it was Johannes's defense that ensured this; see "Torquemada (Juan de)," *Enciclopedia universal ilustrada Europeo-Americana* 62 (1928): 1236, col. 2.

139 Isak Collijn, *Sveriges bibliografi intill år 1600. 1: 1478–1530* (Uppsala: 1934), 1–5; Westman, *Birgitta-studier 1*, 46–47.

140 Benedict XIV, *De servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione*, 2nd ed. (Padua: 1743). The text is cited in "Brigitte du Suède," in Viller, *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 1, col. 1947; AASS, Oct., vol. 4: 412; and more recently in Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'?" 42; Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 32–33.

believers after mature examination," adding that the Christian does not owe the *Revelations* "the total assent of *Catholic* Faith."[141] They do, however, deserve "the assent of *human* faith, according to the rules of prudence." Furthermore, he states that they are "probable" (*probabiles*) and "piously credible" (*pie credibiles*), and that one should not judge them too hastily or show them contempt. Dubious formulations in the text should be "explained in benign and pious interpretation."[142] These standpoints appear to be directly inspired by the texts of the defenders in Basel.

The defenses written in Basel continued to be used as an explanatory commentary on Birgitta's *Revelations* within the Birgittine Order,[143] and Johannes de Turre Cremata's report remained a guarantee of the authenticity of the work in printed editions.[144] His report and the writings of the other defenders in Basel are as yet the only existing commentaries on debated passages in the *Revelations*.

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141 Italics added.

142 Benedict XIV, *De servorum Dei beatificatione*, L. II, c. 32, 11, and L. III, c. 53, 15. In the latter of these passages he quotes Johannes de Turre Cremata; his wordings also resemble those used by Heymericus de Campo in his *Dyalogus* and his *Declaraciones*, UUB, C 518, fols 136r–137r.

143 Examples are given in Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 55–59; and Hogg, "St Birgitta's *Revelationes*," 207.

144 The text has been printed together with the *Revelations* in almost all Latin editions of the text.

CHAPTER 5

The History and Spiritual Life of Vadstena Abbey

Birgitta Fritz

The name Vadstena is associated with one of the largest and foremost monasteries in Scandinavia in the later Middle Ages. The first documentary record dates from 1268, and it hints at a substantial estate (*curia*) owned by the royal family on the shores of the large inland lake Vättern. It was an estate with its own means of production and possibly still with serfs.

The present introduction to the history of the motherhouse of the Birgittine Order, Vadstena Abbey, will open with a brief overview of the remarkable story of the estate up to the present day together with an introduction to the sources and literature concerning its history in the medieval period.

In the latter part of the 13th century, a spacious and elegant brick palace was built on the king's private land in Vadstena. It was a splendid and huge building, unparalleled in Sweden at the time. In the mid-14th century, King Magnus Eriksson (1316–74) developed plans to build a monastery to create a distinguished burial place with a rich chantry tradition, and he chose to situate it in Vadstena. In the will that he and Queen Blanche (of Namur) signed on 1 May 1346, detailed prescriptions are outlined about the intended monastic church. Special attention was paid to its chancel and the royal grave monument in front of the high altar where all kinds of precious liturgical vessels and relics could be housed.[1] In the end, however, the plans for a mausoleum

1 Riksarkivet, SDHK 887. All references to medieval documents in the National Archives of Sweden (Riksarkivet) are given with the SDHK number (Svenskt Diplomatariums Huvudkartotek) and can be searched in the database found on the website https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sdhk. On the database, see Claes Gejrot, "Diplomatarium Suecanum in the Digital World," *Mirator* theme issue 2005: Proceedings from the Symposium "Virtually Medieval." For the history of the estate, abbey, and town, see various articles by Birgitta Fritz in *600 år i Vadstena. Vadstenas historia från äldsta tider till år 2000*, eds. Gunnar Lindqvist and Göran Söderström (Västervik: 2000), 55–207; Julia Sigurdson and Sune Zachrisson, *Aplagårdar och klosterliljor. 800 år kring Vadstena klosters historia* (Malmö: 2012), 39–71; Birgitta Fritz, "Medeltidens Vadstena—nu äldre, större och bättre befäst," in *Fragment ur arkiven. Festskrift till Jan Brunius*, eds. Marie Lennersand, Åsa Karlsson, and Henrik Klackenberg (Västerås: 2013), 288–305. The two Swedish documents with their original seals are kept in Riksarkivet. For the will from 1346, written in Old Swedish, see Riksarkivet, SDHK 5307, and for the Norwegian will from 1347, with the text in Latin, see SDHK 5459. See also Birgitta Fritz, "Kung Magnus Eriksson's planer för Vadstena klosterkyrka—och Birgittas," in *Kongsmenn og krossmen. Festskrift*

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for the Swedish royal family—a simpler version of Saint-Denis in France or Westminster in England—were for various reasons never brought to fruition. Although the will mentions an abbey, it is not the same abbey that Birgitta Birgersdotter expressed a wish to establish as a means of encouraging piety in Sweden. As the "bride and channel" of Christ, she cast herself in the role of intermediary between heaven and earth according to her revelations. Her monastic rule was allegedly received in a revelation.[2] The king's plans for an extravagantly decorated burial chapel with grandiose ceremonies were at odds with Birgitta's ascetic ambitions, however. For her, the true and pure virtues of humility, chastity, and poverty were supreme. Yet despite the parting of ways that is assumed to have taken place between the king and the Swedish noblewoman, the Vadstena estate was in fact donated to Birgitta's foundation even before the king was deposed in 1364. And by the time that Birgitta's relics were brought from Rome to Vadstena in 1374, amid popular rejoicing, building work was already well under way.

Vadstena Abbey had a rich spiritual and cultural life, and it became not only the largest and richest abbey of its kind in medieval Scandinavia—ironically, in contrast to Birgitta's poverty ideal—but also the motherhouse of 26 other convents around Europe, as well as the owner of Birgitta's house in Rome.[3] Large numbers of pilgrims were increasingly drawn to the graves of Birgitta, her daughter Katarina Ulfsdotter, and some leading clerics. A miracle tradition evolved around them, and the abbey started to gain generous indulgence provisions. By October 1384, building work had progressed so well that the bishop of Linköping diocese, where the abbey was situated, was able to inspect the buildings, and the first sisters and brethren of both convents and the abbey were consecrated according to the liturgical ritual outlined in the monastic rule. The church was not consecrated until 1430, but it was gradually taken into use at an earlier date.

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til Grethe Authén Blom, ed. Steinar Supphellen (Trondheim: 1992), 115–29; Birgitta Fritz, "Vadstena klosterkyrka och kung Magnus' testamente 1346," in *Birgitta av Vadstena. Pilgrim och Profet 1303–1373*, eds. Per Beskow and Annette Landen (Stockholm: 2003), 285–96.

2 For the history of the rule, see the introduction by Bridget Morris in Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Denis Searby, with Introductions and Notes by Bridget Morris, 4 vols (Oxford: 2006–15), vol. 4: 109–14. A survey of the rules and statutes is found in Ruth Rajamaa, *Systrarnas verksamhet, undervisning och uppfostran i Vadstena kloster 1384–1595* (Stockholm: 1992), 260–61.

3 Important works concerning the order, as well as Vadstena Abbey, are: Torvald Höjer, *Studier i Vadstena klosters och birgittinordens historia intill midten af 1400-talet* (Uppsala: 1905); Lars-Arne Norborg, *Storföretaget Vadstena kloster. Studier i senmedeltida godspolitik och ekonomiförvaltning* (Lund: 1958). On Birgitta's house in Rome, see Extrav.: 107 and 225, and n. 35 in the introductory chapter to the present volume.

A tightly populated community soon sprang up around the monastic settlement on its land, and the provincial town of Vadstena was given its royal charter in 1400. The town and the abbey became a focal meeting place for spiritual leaders and leading laymen who took up residence there to gain from being in the proximity of the abbey and its relics; such individuals financed several of the private altars in the abbey church. In the 15th century, Vadstena also became a merchant town of note, and protected by a system of wooden fortifications and moats.

At the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation in 1527, the brethren soon disappeared from the abbey, while some of the nuns, despite numerous difficulties, remained there until the end of the century. The abbey functioned temporarily as a stronghold for the Counter-Reformation, and it was not closed until 1595. In the 17th century, its buildings were used as a lodging for invalid soldiers, and later as an asylum. In an architectural excavation carried out in the 1950s, it was discovered that the old royal palace had been rebuilt and partially reconstructed at the end of the 14th century to serve as the abbey's main building.[4] Today, the monastic buildings are used as a museum and hotel, and the abbey church as a parish church.

The source material for the abbey's history is extensive, at least by Scandinavian standards, and therefore it is comparatively well known, and the literature about Vadstena is rich. The large monastic archive was confiscated when the abbey's possessions and finances fell under the control of the crown in the 16th century. Today they are preserved in Riksarkivet (The National Archives) in Stockholm.[5] Some of the abbey's surviving parchment manuscripts in the Swedish language are housed in Kungliga Biblioteket (The National Library) in Stockholm. Many parchment liturgical volumes in Latin were broken up after the Reformation and used as wrappers for the crown's administrative papers, now in Riksarkivet.[6] The smaller-sized paper manuscripts fared better

4 Iwar Anderson, *Vadstena gård och kloster*, 2 vols (Uppsala: 1972); Eva Lotta Hillbom, *Munkklostret i Vadstena. En undersökning 1979–1980* (Riksantikvarieämbetet, Rapport UV 1983), 8 (Stockholm: 1983). Elisabeth Regner, "Monastic Vision and Archaeology. Vadstena Abbey Revisited," in *Saint Birgitta, Syon and Vadstena: Papers from a Symposium in Stockholm 4–6 October 2007*, eds. Claes Gejrot, Sara Risberg, and Mia Åkestam (Stockholm: 2010), 110–28.

5 For information on the printed charters and letters (–1379, 1401–20), the reader may turn to *Diplomatarium Suecanum* (1839–2017), and, for those not yet in print, to the mentioned database.

6 See Jan Brunius (ed.), *Medieval Book Fragments in Sweden: An International Seminar in Stockholm 13–16 November 2003* (Stockholm: 2005); Jan Brunius, *From Manuscripts to Wrappers: Medieval Book Fragments in the Swedish National Archives*, Archival Guide (Växjö: 2013); Anna Wolodarskwoi, "The Vadstena Library: Making New Discoveries," in *The Birgittine Experience: Papers from the Birgitta Conference in Stockholm 2011*, eds. Claes Gejrot, Mia Åkestam, and

after the confiscation of the archive and library, and they were eventually given to Uppsala University Library, where they now form a substantial part of the so-called C-collection.[7] The memorial book, *Liber memorialis*, later known as *Diarium Vadstenense* (C 89, C 92), takes pride of place in this collection.[8] It records events that occurred in the abbey, and, to a lesser extent, the town and kingdom, during the whole of the medieval period. Other important sources to Vadstena Abbey are, of course, the *Regula Salvatoris* and *Revelaciones extravagantes*, in which the plans of the layout and internal organization of the intended abbey are presented, as well as Birgitta's *Vita* and the miracle stories that were compiled not only concerning Birgitta but also her daughter Katarina, her confessor Master Peter Olofsson of Skänninge (who was the first Confessor General of Vadstena Abbey), and Bishop Nils Hermansson.[9]

1 The Emergence of the Abbey

Birgitta won the tug-of-war with the devil and the king over the Vadstena estate, and against the background of the spiritual decay of the existing dilapidated "vineyards," with her divine authority she sought to build a "new vineyard in honor of Our Lady and Our Lord."[10] Her intention in founding the new order was to increase piety and lead a renewal in the Church and society. An innovation in Birgitta's foundation was that it was primarily intended for women and its figurehead was the Virgin Mary.

Sources suggest that conversion of the abandoned and uninhabited palace had commenced by the end of the 1360s. Donations of land and money were

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Roger Andersson (Stockholm: 2013), 30–53. See also the database of Riksarkivet for medieval book fragments: https://sok.riksarkivet.se/MPO.

7 For the printed catalogue, see MHUU.

8 The *Diarium Vadstenense*, hereafter the *Vadstena Diary*, is published in a critical edition by Claes Gejrot (ed.), *Diarium Vadstenense. The Memorial Book of Vadstena Abbey* (Stockholm: 1988). For a modern Swedish translation, see *Vadstenadiariet. Latinsk text med översättning och kommentarer*, trans. Claes Gejrot (Stockholm: 1996). References to the *Vadstena Diary* in the present chapter are to the latter edition.

9 RS and Extrav.: *passim*; AP; *Processus seu negocium canonicazionis B. Katerine de Vadstenis*, ed. Isak Collijn, SFSS (Uppsala: 1942–46); Henrik Schück, "Två svenska biografier från medeltiden," *Antiqvarisk tidskrift för Sverige* 5 (1873–95): 295–474; Tryggve Lundén (ed.), *Sankt Nikolaus av Linköping kanonisationsprocess. Processus canonizacionis beati Nicolai Lincopensis* (Stockholm: 1963).

10 On "the new vineyard," see RS: 2–3. See also Anderson, *Vadstena gård och kloster*, vol. 1: 6–7. On how Birgitta managed to win Vadstena, see Extrav.: 24–2; and Stephan Borgehammar, "St. Birgitta, an Architect of Spiritual Reform," *Birgittiana* 5 (1998): 23–47.

given "for the place of the abbey in Vadstena which has now been chosen and consecrated," as is stated in letters from 1368.[11] The building was developed in accordance with Birgitta's prescriptions and with regard to the existing layout of the buildings, which were to be "made humble."[12] Sources refer to stone buildings that were dilapidated, and there are archaeological traces of collapse and fire damage in the walls of the earlier palace.[13]

At the same time as Birgitta was seeking to persuade Pope Urban V to approve her new monastic rule—which had been written down by Prior Peter Olofsson at Alvastra Abbey—on 5 August 1370 the pope charged the archbishop and two bishops in Sweden to investigate whether the site had been lawfully acquired and was suitable for monastic use. Meanwhile, Urban V granted a generous indulgence to all people who made donations towards the building.[14] A monastic community quickly sprang up and divine service started to be held. There are early letters of admission, and Katarina Ulfsdotter, who for more than twenty years had lived with her mother in Rome, is referred to as the abbess, despite her not being ordained as a nun or formally elected as abbess.[15]

After Birgitta's relics had been brought home and buried in the abbey's temporary wooden chapel in 1374, large numbers of pilgrims flocked to Vadstena to pray by her grave, to seek cures for illnesses, to express gratitude for miracles, and to receive indulgences.[16] The abbey's reputation for miracle-working spread rapidly around Scandinavia. The testimonies concerning Birgitta's life and miracles wrought in her name, which led to her rapid canonization in 1391, began to be collected around this time, and her cause also gained support internationally.

Building an abbey and obtaining a canonization was a costly business. Nor were the privileges granted by the curia cheaply acquired. The king pronounced "Our Lady's Penny" ("Vårfrupenning"), a saint's tax to be given annually by the whole kingdom. Notwithstanding this tax and later royal fines and many gifts in the form of possessions and money, the whole building venture was undermined by economic difficulties and had to be discontinued temporarily to give priority to worship and support for the pious, especially women,

11 Concerning the gifts to the planned monastery, see Riksarkivet, SDHK 9203, 9325; *Vadstena Diary*, 92–93 (132).

12 Extrav.: 25–26; Rev. I: 18.

13 Anderson, *Vadstena gård och kloster*, vol. I: 10, 19, and 45. Riksarkivet, SDHK 15267.

14 Extrav.: 45–46; 49. Riksarkivet, SDHK 9751, 9755.

15 Höjer, *Studier*, 83. Riksarkivet, SDHK 10684 (a later copy).

16 *Vadstena Diary*, 36–37 (31).

who had gathered in Vadstena.[17] The novices who entered the abbey had to pay their way, and a charge was levied on those who wanted a burial place in the abbey church. Further income was generated when the parish church and other neighboring churches were incorporated in 1380.

2 Affiliation and Organization

The whole enterprise at Vadstena and its daughter houses was built upon the revised version Birgitta's rule that was ratified by Urban VI on 3 December 1378—this was the *Regula Salvatoris*, which was principally the version that Birgitta allegedly received from Christ in a divine revelation.[18] Her prescriptions were later complemented by the *Addiciones seu constituciones ad regulam Sancti Salvatori*.[19] The main issue concerned not just an abbey consisting of two convents for the sisters and the brethren, respectively, but also a monastic order that had to be based on the Augustinian rule because of the prohibition of establishing new orders proclaimed at the fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The actual name of Birgitta's order was *Ordo Sancti Augustini Sancti Salvatoris*, i.e. "The Savior's Order According to the Rule of St Augustine."

The Birgittines had a relationship to the Augustinian Order similar to that of the Cistercians to the Benedictine Order. Since 1370, through their founding charter, they had already been participants in the Augustinian Order's exemptions, privileges, freedoms, and rights, and later they had been granted the indulgence which belonged to the Augustinians. The abbey received bulls that granted further indulgences.[20] The fact that Vadstena became so highly privileged did not depend on any special apostolic concern for the foundation, but rather on the papacy's weakness at the time due to the Great Schism. It would all be put into question at a later date.

A number of papal privileges, both general and specific to Vadstena, thus laid the foundation for the developing abbey's independence from ecclesiastical and secular authority, and they provided the basis for its religious and economic standing. The Birgittines were under the authority of the papal curia and were therefore exempt from ordinary church administration and taxation.

17 Claes Gejrot, "Att sätta ljuset i ljusstaken. Birgittinsk lobbying vid mitten av 1370-talet," in *Medeltidens mångfald. Studier i samhällsliv, kultur och kommunikation tillägnade Olle Ferm*, ed. Göran Dahlbäck (Stockholm: 2008), 91–94; Extrav.: 32; Riksarkivet, SDHK 8568, 8920, 8922.

18 Riksarkivet, SDHK 11355. RS: 141–73.

19 In *Revelaciones extravagantes* (see Extrav.).

20 Höjer, *Studier*, 132–50.

But unlike other orders that came directly under the authority of the papacy, a complete exemption was not in operation, but rather Vadstena was subordinate to the jurisdiction and regulations of the diocesan bishop, as *pater* and *visitator*.[21] The bishop of Linköping in fact had visitation rights and obligations, and worship at the abbey had to follow local diocesan practice.

Papal statutes and privileges, dating from Birgitta's death onwards, were confirmed on 1 May 1413 in Pope John XXIII's bull known as *Mare Magnum*, a common name for a compilation bull which was in practice a lengthy written constitution.[22] The bull provided the summation of an effort to coordinate all the Birgittine abbeys which were gradually being founded abroad, starting with Marienbrunn at Danzig (Gdansk) and Paradiso in Florence. In time, despite the imposition of all sorts of measures, it became difficult to hold this complex organization together, the more so as some of the daughter houses showed an inclination towards complete independence.

Vadstena is sometimes mistakenly described as a double cloister. In reality there were two convents, intended to operate side by side within the abbey walls; in practice, they remained as two completely separate enclosures. Birgitta had outlined two convents, and the pope had emphasized the strict observance of the division between them. Nor were both monastic groups equal; they lived different types of monastic life.[23] Thirteen ordained brethren, eight laymen, and four normally ordained deacons—in all, 25 men under the leadership of one confessor general (*confessor omnium*)—provided spiritual support to the 60 nuns. The men's yard was not called the cloister (*monasterium*), but rather the presbytery (*curia*) and contemporary documents referred to the men not as monks (*monachi*) but as brethren (*fratres*). In total the convent members were 60 sisters and 13 priests, plus deacons and lay brethren who symbolized the 13 apostles and 72 disciples (Luke 10:1).[24] To assist with temporal matters there were four brethren and four sisters *ab extra* ("from without"), as they were known. They did not enter the enclosure, which was restricted to the monks and nuns *ab intra*. The confessor general was elected by both convents and had to be approved by the abbess, and she was elected on similar lines. The abbey came to have a total of 291 consecrated nuns and 170 brethren.

21 According to RS: 23. See Maria Berggren, "Exhibeatis Deo hostiam vivam. Biskopsvisitation och systrapredikan i Vadstena kloster," in *Dicit Scriptura. Studier i C-samlingen tillägnade Monica Hedlund*, ed. Sara Risberg (Stockholm: 2006), 135–48.

22 Riksarkivet, SDHK 18001.

23 RS: 10; Höjer, *Studier*, 35–45.

24 RS: 10; Extrav.: 33, 35.

Almost all were of Swedish birth, with the curious exception of two southern women who accompanied Birgitta's relics from Rome in 1374.

The abbess of Vadstena was a woman with great power; indeed, she was probably the most important medieval woman in Sweden after the queen. Despite this, the matriarchal and Mariological foundation was integrated into an overall patriarchal structure.[25]

The abbey's organization and the development of the order were such that they were easily susceptible to power struggles breaking out between the two convents. To have a woman in charge could not have been easy for the men to accept, especially as many of them were well educated and had come from positions of authority in society. Consequently, the male convent and the confessor general soon started to adopt a more prominent role than the rule had originally intended. In organizational terms this was seen in the formation of a constitution with regular chapters and visitations.

3 The Abbey Buildings and Enclosure

The brick-built convent was situated to the north, south, and west of the abbey church. At least six of the original estate buildings were adapted for different purposes within the enclosure. The rebuilt former palace became the sisters' convent, with a work room and meeting room on the ground floor and the dormitory on the upper floor. The work room, according to Birgitta's wishes, was to be large and have a good window.[26] The sisters would meet every day in the chapter house to listen to readings from the *Regula*, pray for the souls of the departed, deliberate on the abbey's affairs, and deal with violations of the rule.

The part which had been the east wing of the palace and now faced the garden and graveyard was the sisters' point of entry and contact with the world outside. By means of the upper floor they could go from the dormitory to their elevated gallery in the east part of the church. The kitchen and refectory were as before in the original palace, located in the west wing. The sisters' buildings thus lay around a quadrangle, today a grassed courtyard, surrounded by a cloister with a stone building on the south side.[27] Other buildings lay further away

25 RS: 12; Extrav.: 20–21; *Vadstena Diary*, 142–43 (235).

26 Anderson, *Vadstena gård och kloster*, vol. 1: 72. For a plan, see Sigurdson and Zachrisson, *Aplagårdar och klosterliljor*, 88; G.E. Klemming, "Lucidarium," *Birgittas uppenbarelser V*, SFSS (Stockholm: 1883–84), 82 (308).

27 Anderson, *Vadstena gård och kloster*, vol. 1: 108–10.

on the lakeside, and there were covered passages leading to the bathing house and the privy over the lake.

One of the 13th-century houses was used for the brethren's entry to the world, while a convent with a dormitory was built to the south of the church, at right angles to the chancel. The southern wing with a cross-vaulted interior that is still visible became the chapter house, and another wing that was later demolished was the site of the kitchen and refectory. Near the chancel of the church there were some smaller buildings, including the brethren's library, a sanatorium, a secret vault for the abbey's treasures, and a small punishment chamber, and on the lakeside various small buildings were used for different purposes.

Communication between the two convents, each of which had its separate existence within the same walls, was handled by means of a room with openings in the dividing wall for conversation and for the exchange of objects using a rotating barrel. Rules for the brethren about entering the nuns' convent and vice versa were severe. The brethren could only enter the nuns' area in order to administer the last rites, whereas the nuns could only access the brethren's buildings to provide sick care. A flagrant breach is recounted for the daughter house in Nådendal in modern-day Finland, where the confessor general sought absolution in 1472 for having had a relationship with two sisters; details of his case are recorded in the penitentiary archives in Rome.[28]

4 The Abbey Church

The church was erected out of limestone on the site of a temporary wooden chapel. The new abbey church first came into use in 1422 and was consecrated on 16 February 1430, although work was not properly finished until a later date.[29] It was a whitewashed church with three aisles of equal height. The central nave extended into a low-level square main chancel in the west. For practical reasons, and contrary to what Birgitta had advocated, brick was utilized for the arcading, and the ribs of the star vaults were painted. In other respects, Birgitta aspired towards the simple and sparsely decorated interiors

28 RS: 6, 22. *Auctoritate Papae. The Church Province of Uppsala and the Apostolic Penitentiary 1410–1526*, ed. Sara Risberg, with an introduction by Kirsi Salonen (Stockholm: 2008), 257 (§180).

29 Extrav.: 28–29, 31; and *Vadstena Diary*, 198–99 (412). On the church of Vadstena Abbey, see Iwar Anderson, Aron Andersson, and Robert Bennett, *Vadstena klosterkyrka. Sveriges kyrkor. Östergötland*, 3 vols, vol. 1, *Kyrkobyggnaden*, KVHAA (Borås: 1983–91).

of the Cistercians.[30] She also demanded moderation in the liturgy, singing, and preaching.[31]

The most special part of the church was the east side, which was reserved for the sisters who were at the heart of this monastic foundation. They had an elevated and concealed position with an altar dedicated to the Virgin and an altar in the east to which the brethren had access to celebrate mass. It was reached from the brethren's chancel by means of a walled gallery that ran along the brick walls the whole length of the church. This gallery was also suitable for processional use.

The high altar, where Birgitta's shrine was situated, was dedicated to St Peter and was situated in the west between the chancel and the nave. The church housed many relics besides those of Birgitta and her daughter Katarina. Several depositions were made at Birgitta's shrine, the last in a costly silver shrine in 1412, and Katarina was enshrined amid great celebration in 1489.[32] Birgitta was celebrated throughout the Western Church from 1391 onwards while Katarina, who achieved the status of beatification, could only be celebrated in the diocese and in all Birgittine convents. The abbey church in Vadstena housed a growing number of altars, many of which were around the pillars and most of which had an independent priest attached to them. Sources suggest that in 1432 there were 42 altars, and by the end of the Middle Ages there were 60.[33]

The abbey church at Vadstena had an unusual structure, and it must have seemed exceptional to observers at the time. Although it was built for the monastic community it also had room for processions and crowds of laypeople, to whom the brethren were obliged to preach in Swedish. The laity entered the church through the doors in the east wall. Their allotted space was segregated by a railing.

Each day the brethren celebrated mass and the office. Everything except the sermon was in Latin and adhered to the liturgical calendar of Linköping Cathedral. The sisters sang the Mass to Our Lady each day and Salve Regina on Saturdays. They had a specially composed weekly rite that included seven Mary offices, known as *Cantus sororum*, which concentrated on a part of the Virgin's life on each weekday. The nuns chanted their office after the brethren.

30 RS: 18; Extrav.: 31, 34. Norborg, *Storföretaget Vadstena kloster*, 81–85.

31 Extrav.: 4.

32 *Vadstena Diary*, 58–59 (77) and 132–33 (214); Birgitta Fritz and Lars Elfving (eds. and trans.), *Den stora kyrkofesten för Sankta Katarina i Vadstena 1489. Samtida texter med översättning och kommentar* (Stockholm: 2004).

33 Andersson, *Vadstena klosterkyrka*, vol. 2: 11–16. *Vadstena Diary*, 174–75 (330).

They also sang *Ave maris stella* each day after Vespers.[34] As to the nuns' confession and communion, there were five niches, with an opening for each in the north wall of the chancel and an area that lay behind where the sisters could wait. Both the sisters and the brethren had to make confession at least three times a year, preferably more frequently.[35]

Yet the almost continual celebration of divine services, with the first office of the day and high mass constituting a block of worship of six to nine hours, as with the later offices of the day, was not intended for all. Ordained priests officiated at the services, concealed in their chancel behind the high altar, and the sisters participated out of sight in their gallery. The sisters followed a set pattern of sitting, standing, genuflecting, and bowing, which probably helped them to stay awake and warm in the cold church during winter.

The priest brethren in the chancel celebrated memorial masses (*anniversarium*) for the souls of the departed and read out their names from a book, probably the volume known as the *Liber vitae*; a better-known equivalent is the Syon Martiloge.[36] Masses for the dead and other offices were also celebrated at the many private altars around the church. Belief in the sacrificial aspect of the mass was extremely powerful; the progress of the soul was eased through the mass, prayer, and singing, as well as through good deeds, and the soul was freed from purgatory and reached heaven more quickly.

The many graves which are to be found inside the church, some with an elevated slab and gravestone, were probably at odds with Birgitta's stipulations.[37] The most distinguished of the secular graves is that of Queen Philippa, daughter of Henry IV and sister of Henry V of England, situated in the choir of St Anne, which was consecrated in 1426. Initially, it should be remembered, the abbey was an aristocratic foundation, and many members of the high nobility chose to be buried in the church. In total about 100 medieval gravestones are preserved.[38]

34 RS: 4; Extrav.: 3–4, 8; SA, pp. 73–137. See also Tore Nyberg (ed.), *Birgittinsk festgåva. Studier om Heliga Birgitta och Birgittinorden* (Uppsala: 1991), 131–45. Viveca Servatius, "Sjungande systrar," in Beskow and Landen, *Birgitta av Vadstena* (Stockholm: 2003), 345–62.

35 RS: 14, 22.

36 For the latter, see Claes Gejrot (ed. and trans.), *The Martiloge of Syon Abbey*: *The Texts Relevant to the History of the English Birgittines* (Stockholm: 2015).

37 Extrav.: 38.

38 Anderson, Andersson, and Bennett, *Vadstena klosterkyrka*, vol. 3.

5 The Buildings and the Business

The abbey was operated as a large household with many people to provide for on its own farmlands, which included both livestock and crops. This all required buildings and manpower. The Vadstena estate in the Middle Ages was roughly eight times bigger than an average local farm. It lay at the heart of an extensive, self-sustaining, and well-structured complex of estates, with a total of around 800 livestock and leasehold farms and properties in the whole kingdom.[39] By the time of the Reformation the abbey was one of the country's largest landholders and it periodically ran into difficulties with its investments. It has been described—pertinently—as a "largescale enterprise."[40]

The estate was managed by a foreman who had charge of about 80 paid laborers and farmhands with specific tasks, as well as locals on day wages and citizens who had to do daywork on the farm. A team of itinerant agents dealt with the administration of the farm network around the kingdom. There was a person responsible for collecting income from all parts of the country, including revenue in kind. Even if not everything came through the abbey's gates, there would have been a continual stream of carts and sledges with goods, including mined iron, which flowed into the abbey's storehouses.

The vast monastic enterprise demanded high-level organizational, accounting, and bookkeeping skills. Birgitta wished to relieve the brethren as far as possible from material concerns to give them time to study etc., and therefore all of the above tasks fell mainly to the abbess. The maintenance and estate managers were answerable to her and the confessor general and they had to account for everything, including any donations. The abbess oversaw the accounts down to the smallest detail in the day-to-day running of the household, the estates, and all business dealings, even in the town. In turn she herself had a clear accountability, and the bookkeeping had to be exact, as did the auditing of the accounts. Interestingly, the abbess had a small office with overnight facilities near the "gate to the world" but within the enclosure, where she could deal with her financial and administrative tasks. She was aided by an assistant scribe, some of the older sisters helped her with the bookkeeping, and some of the brethren assisted with valuations and the selling of offerings. Everything that was needed for any work around the abbey was authorized and allocated by the abbess.

Many buildings had a clearly designated purpose within the protected monastic area. The function of the manufacturing buildings, such as the

39 Norborg, *Storföretaget Vadstena kloster*, 141–71.

40 "Storföretaget" (as in the title above) means a large-scale enterprise.

cellar, cookhouse, bathing hut, brewery, drying house, cattle shed, smithy, stable, and brick kiln, is quite clear. It is not hard to identify the purpose of those and the buildings of the servant folk, the laborers' yard, the workshops, and storerooms.[41] It is more difficult, however, to interpret the function of the buildings with the name of Borgaregården ("burghers' yard") and Romaregården ("Roman yard"). These may have been where the more prominent guests were given their quarters, although accommodation was not provided as a rule.

In terms of management of the property and economic output the brethren soon demanded more say in matters than the rule prescribed. They wanted more involvement in the abbey's economic management and they wanted greater decision-making powers. A reorganization of the financial administration took place in the 1440s and 1450s that resulted in the establishment of a number of rules and regulations, and a land register that is still extant. The brethren's striving for economic independence and their increased administrative influence became ever more insistent. The confessor and priest brethren maneuvered themselves into a position of control in economic questions. The sisters did not take kindly to this, which was against the rule.[42]

6 The Inner Life of the Convents

The main goal of the monastic community was to aspire towards Christian perfection. Piety in daily worship and devout spiritual exercises could earn indulgences for the community. The nun's convent was ascetic and contemplative, while the brethren's task, beyond the cloister walls, was to mediate the experience of the contemplative life to the laity. Time was spent occupied in a range of activities: conducting masses, offices, prayers, preaching, petitions, meditation, studies, composition, writing, translation, reading, and choir practice, as well as manual work. All time was dedicated to God's honor and praise, partly in singing, reading, or learning, and partly by the "work of their hands." According to the rule, the nuns and brethren had to praise God with their mouth, serve him with their hands, and give the body its necessities as appropriate. As a basis for all this, besides the *Regula Salvatoris*, a customary

41 See Fritz in Lindqvist and Söderström, *600 år i Vadstena*, 101–4.

42 RS: 13. Nyberg, *Birgittinsk festgåva*, 111–30. Anna Larsson (ed.), *Vadstena klosters två äldsta jordeböcker med inledning och språklig kommentar* (SFSS) (Uppsala: 1971).

book was written, known as the *Lucidarium* for the sisters, and the *Liber usuum* for the brethren.[43]

Part of the sisters' devotional life involved private silent meditation and daily visits to the grave that was always left open inside the sisters' gate to remind them of death.[44] They also processed around their cloister on Fridays in song, and carried a crucifix on certain major feast days.[45] The minimum age of admission for a nun was 18 years, and for a brother it was 25 years. This did not prevent the abbey from admitting a royal princess in 1455 who was a minor.[46] Most of the female novices were young and with limited education or experience, and they had to be schooled into the ways of monastic life.[47] It was necessary to inculcate the monastic rules and teach the novice to graft the ideals of humility, chastity, and poverty into her character.

Birgitta's rule is specific in its description for the consecration of nuns. The aspiring nun was to be repeatedly tested and made to understand how demanding the monastic life was, and how her consecration meant taking leave of the world and one's relatives. After a trial year as a novitiate, the prospective nun was questioned by the bishop, who had to establish that she stood free from all worldly ties and that it was her burning love for Christ that was her innermost motivating desire. At that point she was led into the abbey church preceded by two torches and a red standard bearing an image of Christ's Passion on one side and the Virgin on the other. These symbols indicated to the nun-to-be that as a subject bride she was ready to share her bridegroom's suffering, and to learn to imitate Christ and to suppress her own will in subjugation to that of the bridegroom. These were the two most important sides of Birgitta's image of the nun, with the emphasis on the latter. After the questions and promises the bishop placed a ring on the nun's right hand at the altar and she now became the bride of Christ. During the offertory in the mass, the nun—now disrobed from her worldly attire—was clothed in the various items of the nun's habit, ending with the veil and the crown with five blood-red

43 Sara Risberg (ed.), *Liber usuum fratrum monasterii Vadstenensis. The Customary of the Vadstena Brothers. A Critical Edition with an Introduction* (Stockholm: 2003); Klemming, "Lucidarium"; Ingela Hedström, "One Customary to Rule Them All: On the 'Lucidarium' and its Transmission," in Gejrot, Åkestam, and Andersson, *The Birgittine Experience*, 351–69.

44 RS: 25; Klemming, "Lucidarium," 65 (§286) and 88 (§816).

45 RS: 8; Extrav.: 9; Klemming, "Lucidarium," 91–92 (§§320–21).

46 *Vadstena Diary*, 282–83 (658); Extrav.: 16.

47 RS: 19. In the *Vadstena Diary*, the novices are said to be virgins, wives, or widows, e.g. 76–77 (110), 116–17 (169), and 282–83 (658). See also Nyberg, *Birgittinsk festgåva*, 206–14.

spots symbolizing Christ's wounds, particular for the Birgittines.[48] The newly initiated nun prostrated herself on the ground, now dead to the world, and received absolution from the bishop before being handed over to the abbess after the communion.

Birgitta placed high demands on the ordained brethren. They were expected to be experienced as priests and well educated; indeed, many had studied abroad before the foundation of Uppsala University in 1477.[49] Besides their duty as officiants in worship they were also expected to preach and hear confession as part of their pastoral care. The priests and deacons read and elaborated on the Gospels in Swedish to the nuns. Texts in Latin were often directly translated by the preacher himself. They preached in the vernacular to pilgrims and local town-dwellers but they preached in Latin to each other and to other priests.[50]

The abbey seems to have been self-supporting in relation to most things, even handicraft and ornamentation. The laymen who dealt with non-priestly labor are mentioned in the *Vadstena Diary* as being all sorts of good craftsmen, but there was no question of externally selling their products, except books.[51] Textiles for liturgical use, including priestly vestments and altar cloths, as well as everyday clothes and materials for the community, were made and mended by the sisters inside the abbey.[52]

48 Angela Kappeler, "The Birgittine Linen Crown," in Gejrot, Åkestam, and Andersson, *The Birgittine Experience*, 136–70.

49 On some of the learned brothers, see *Vadstena Diary*, 204–5 (437), 208–9 (448), 350–53 (808), and 356–57 (826).

50 See Roger Andersson and Stephan Borgehammar, "The Preaching of the Birgittine Friars at Vadstena Abbey (ca 1380–1515)," *Revue Mabillon*, n.s. 8, (vol. 69) (1997): 206–36; Roger Andersson, *De birgittinska ordensprästerna som traditionsförmedlare och folkfostrare. En studie i svensk medeltidspredikan på den 8:e söndagen efter trefaldighet* (Stockholm: 2001); Roger Andersson, "Översättaren som predikant. Clemens Petri och svenska språket," in Risberg, *Dicit Scriptura*, 149–64. See also Chapter 6 by Roger Andersson in the present volume.

51 Risberg, *Liber usuum*, c. 23 (213); Jan von Bondsdorff and Margareta Kempff, "Vadstena kloster—ett medeltida konstcentrum?" in *I Heliga Birgittas trakter*, ed. Göran Dahlbäck (Uppsala: 1990), 259–87; Nils Dverstorp, "Evidence for Commercial Book Production in Vadstena Abbey?" in Gejrot, Åkestam, and Andersson, *The Birgittine Experience*, 323–32.

52 RS: 20; "Lucidarium," 80–83 (§§306–9) and 98–99 (§330).

7 The Archive, Library, and Scriptorium

Letters and documents were continually dispatched to and from the abbey, and the brethren in charge had to preserve and keep order of all transactions as part of their duty to protect the abbey's interests. The neatly written foundation charter and privileges were kept in a shrine in the sacristy, and the land records in a cupboard in the library.[53] The foundation document of the abbey had pride of place as reference number 1 in archive drawer A. The most important transactions were also copied in registers and copy books (as codices A 19 and A 20 in Riksarkivet).[54] That it was important to have access to documents relating to land rights is illustrated in connection with the reduction of crown properties in 1399, when the abbey was able to prove its ownership of the estate by producing the original royal will of 1346.[55] The *Vadstena Diary* relates that there was a secret hiding place for such key documents in situations when they were put under threat.[56]

Great efforts were made by the abbey to obtain the canonizations of Birgitta and, later, Katarina, as well as the indulgences that were granted during the papal schism and confirmed in later bulls. The resulting correspondence with the papal seat, the daughter-houses, and the many spiritual and secular Swedish and foreign leaders, institutions, and individuals, was therefore substantial.[57] The abbey had to persuade the native and foreign princes as well as spiritual and secular leaders repeatedly to write petitions to the pope, church councils, and every nation individually. This was done especially during the time of the great reforming councils of the Church in the 15th century.[58] The Birgittines were still being accused of heresy and investigated by a theological

53 On the library, see Monica Hedlund and Alf Härdelin (eds.), *Vadstena klosters bibliotek. Ny katalog och nya forskningsmöjligheter* (Uppsala: 1990).

54 See Peter Ståhl, "Vadstena klosters stora kopiebok. En presentation av handskriften A 20 i Riksarkivet," in *Kyrka, helgon och vanliga dödliga. Årsbok för Riksarkivet och Landsarkiven 2003* (Stockholm: 2003), 35–64; Peter Ståhl, "Medeltida kopieböcker i Riksarkivet," *Arkiv, samhälle och forskning* 1–2 (2004): 88–92.

55 *Vadstena Diary*, 72–73 (103).

56 *Vadstena Diary*, 236–37 (523).

57 Norborg, *Storföretaget Vadstena kloster*, 111–16. On various correspondences mentioned in the *Vadstena Diary,* see Birgitta Fritz, "Vadstenas brev," in Hedlund and Härdelin, *Vadstena klosters bibliotek*, 23–33. See also Inger Lindell, *Brev i Vadstena klosters arkiv 1368–1375* (SFSS, Ser. 1, Svenska skrifter 92) (Uppsala: 2010).

58 Ina Friedlaender, "Suppliker från Vadstena kloster och dess gynnare 1416–1419," *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 63 (1963): 86–144. Riksarkivet, SDHK 19140 and 19142. Gejrot, "Att sätta ljuset i ljusstaken," 100–5.

commission at the Council of Basel in 1431–49.[59] It was not easy for the brethren, despite their skills, to answer the demands that the papal chancery placed on the formulation of supplications and other formal petitions in Latin. Another problem was that, to authorize a renewal of privileges, the curia demanded the evidence of an original bull while the abbey rightly regarded it as a risk to transport such valuable documents across continental Europe.[60]

The daughter-houses of Vadstena required copies of key documents, and the brethren spent much time in collating, copying, and attesting central texts. Daughter-houses also requested answers to theological and practical questions; for example, a delegation came to Vadstena from Syon in England in the 1420s to discuss a number of issues.[61] Because of the difficulty in guiding the daughter-houses and preserving Vadstena's overall authority, general chapters had to be convened. Internal disputes in the abbey and order put pressure on both convents and drained their resources. As a consequence of the many problems that arose, many of the internal affairs between the two convents at Vadstena, as between the abbey on the one hand and the town pertaining to it and the urban institutions on the other, came to be regulated in documents.[62]

Vadstena Abbey had a large library. Due to the survival of so many paper manuscripts and an advanced cataloguing system for its time, we know that there were as many as 1500 volumes in the brethren's library.[63] The monastic library was the largest in medieval Sweden and about a third of it still remains, mostly consisting of functional manuscripts, including more than 10,000 recorded sermons.

The library developed in several different ways. The brethren brought with them books from their student years and their earlier employment at cathedral chapters and parish churches, and these books became the abbey's property when the brethren took their vows and renounced their worldly goods. For example, Birgitta's chaplain, Gudmar Fredriksson, who belonged to the first generation of brethren and died in 1389, brought with him at least nine

59 See Anna Fredriksson Adman (ed.), *Heymericus de Campo: Dyalogus super Reuelacionibus beate Birgitte. A Critical Edition with an Introduction* (Uppsala: 2003); Anna Fredriksson Adman, "An Heretical Saint? The Birgittine Case and Heymericus de Campo at the Council of Basel," in *University, Council, City: Intellectual Culture on the Rhine (1300–1550)*, eds. Laurent Cesalli, Nadja Germann, and Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen (Turnhout: 2007), 277–89. See also Chapter 4 by Anna Fredriksson in the present volume.

60 *Vadstena Diary*, 70–71 (101) and 244–45 (547); Extrav.: 7.

61 Elin Andersson, "Vadstena 1427: The Visit of the Syon Brothers," in Gejrot, Risberg, and Åkestam, *Saint Birgitta, Syon and Vadstena*, 104–9.

62 See Fritz in Lindqvist and Söderström, *600 år i Vadstena*, 124–33.

63 Wolodarski, "The Vadstena Library," 30–53.

preserved volumes, among them homilies and other handbooks for preachers.[64] The previous canon of the cathedral in Strängnäs, Johan Svensson, who died in Poland in 1390 on his way to Rome, had studied in both Bologna and Prague. He brought with him 14 volumes, now in the C-collection of Uppsala University Library, and he wrote a substantial canonical work and copied works of philosophy. He was undoubtedly a significant mediator of learning besides being a great preacher.[65] Hans Hildebrandsson, who studied in Prague and Paris, brought many books home from the Council of Constance, which he had attended in 1415 as the abbey's representative.[66] These examples are evidence of a substantial transfer of knowledge from central Europe to Sweden. The confessor general, Nils Ragvaldsson, also contributed to this tradition, and through his work in translating biblical and hagiographical writings he contributed greatly to the shaping of the Swedish written language.[67]

The brethren were allowed to take books to their cells to prepare for their sermons and for devotional reading and meditation. Even the sisters had access to books but naturally could not visit the library that was in the brethren's convent. Instead, the brethren provided, and occasionally copied, suitable reading matter for them, and in this way the sisters' book collection grew. It included literature of moral instruction, which was used for the prescribed readings during mealtimes and on other occasions during the day. Several such manuscripts are preserved. Many of the sisters seem to have been literate, and some are even mentioned in the *Vadstena Diary* as being very well read.[68]

Even if learned writings did end up in the library because the priest brethren had previously pursued academic studies, the Birgittine Order was not an intellectual order and was never intended to be so. The brethren did not enter the order to pursue learned study but rather to occupy themselves rigorously in common worship and private prayer and assist the sisters. They hoped to spread the order's spirituality, that is, the Marian piety that was characteristic

64 *Vadstena Diary*, 102–3 (139), 110–11 (154), 124–25 (187), 300–10 (715), etc. See also Monica Hedlund, "En Vadstenabroders referensbibliotek," in Dahlbäck, *Medeltidens mångfald*, 117–39.

65 See *Vadstena Diary*, 42–43 (45).

66 Hans Hildebrandsson appears in the *Vadstena Diary* on the following pages: 253, 266, 275, 286, 293, 502, 514, and 646. See also Peter Ståhl (ed.), *Johannes Hildebrandi, Liber epistularis* (*Cod. Upsal. C 6*). *Lettres nos 1 à 109* (*fol. 1r à 16r*). *Édition critique avec des analyses et une introduction* (Stockholm: 1998), 1–24.

67 Gejrot, *Diarium Vadstenense*, 13–14; *Vadstena Diary*, 42–43 (45).

68 Gejrot, *Diarium Vadstenense*, 12–13. See also the chapters by Jonas Carlquist, Ingela Hedström, and Inger Lindell, in Gejrot, Risberg, and Åkestam, *Saint Birgitta, Syon and Vadstena*, 146–87; Jonas Carlquist, "Abbedissan lånar böcker. Vadstenasystrarnas tillgång till brödernas bibliotek," in Risberg, *Dicit Scriptura*, 11–31.

of the Late Middle Ages, and emphasized the individual's examination of his or her conscience and prayer life.[69]

The Birgittines were early pioneers of printing. Before the deposition of Katarina's relics in 1489, her *Vita* had been printed in Stockholm. In 1492, 800 copies of Birgitta's *Revelations* were printed in Lübeck (the so-called Ghotan edition).[70] A printing press was obtained for the abbey, which in the short time before it was destroyed by fire in 1495, succeeded in printing the *Horae de Domina*. A single copy of this text remains in Uppsala University Library.[71]

8 Contacts with the Outside World

The chances of a town-dweller of Vadstena meeting a sister in town were minimal. At the point when a sister took her vows and entered the enclosure through the sisters' gate, she renounced the world outside. She was only permitted to leave the abbey if she was ordered to found a new convent. The brethren, on the other hand, had a certain amount of contact with the outside world. Unlike the sisters, they could be seen around the town dressed in their grey homespun apparel with a red cross on a round white background symbolizing the host. Since Vadstena was an income-generating abbey, not a mendicant foundation, there were no excursions from the abbey to preach or beg for alms until after the Reformation. Through their comparatively strict cloistered life, Birgittine abbeys belonged to an older form of monastic life that preceded the mendicant orders. However, the brethren had to protect their order's interests by visiting the papal curia, the king, and the daughter-houses, and some of them became notably well traveled.[72]

Even though the sisters lived a monastic life within the walls, the abbey was not a completely closed world. Four kitchen sisters helped in the household and lived immediately outside the enclosure, but, as required by their work, they sometimes entered the inner part of the abbey. In the same way, there were a number of boys who assisted the brethren. For the sisters' storehouses and cellars, which were presided over by a brother *ab extra*, there were special rules about avoiding contact.[73]

69 Nyberg, *Birgittinsk festgåva*, 9–24.
70 *Vadstena Diary*, 380–81 (893).
71 *Vadstena Diary*, 390–91 (921).
72 *Vadstena Diary*, 70–71 (101), 92–93 (131), 122–25 (185), 142–43 (236), 250–51 (562), etc.
73 Riksarkivet, SDHK 24377.

In their easterly buildings the convents each had a meeting room by their "gate to the world," where visitors were received. Two sisters were entrusted with keys and were always on hand to deal with matters at the sisters' gate.[74] Conversations were held through a grill, and gossip of any sort was prohibited. Both convents were served by gate-messengers, who acted like errand boys. The meeting rooms at the gate to the world must have been a place where all types of tasks of valuing and selling gold, silver, and other valuables on behalf of the sisters, as well as accounting for testamentary gifts and offerings of clothing, copper vessels, and hide, was managed by selecting lay brethren who were accountable to the abbess.[75]

The queen of the Scandinavian Kalmar Union, Margareta, on her visit in 1404, spoke "informally" with the brethren in their meeting room, and in 1415 the relics of Birgitta were exhibited to Queen Philippa in presence of all the brethren. Both queens may have gained closer access to the sisters, especially since they had been accepted as sisters *ab extra* and could thereby share in the abbey's spiritual life.[76] King Eric of Pomerania asked to be admitted to the male convent in 1412; he was not warmly welcomed by the community but was admitted in the end.[77] In the meeting room of both convents witnesses were interrogated concerning the piety of bishop Nils Hermansson in 1417 in order to get him canonized.[78] In 1442, at the brethren's gate, a farmer was made to recite the articles of faith which he had regarded as heretical.[79] This is one of the two only known cases of heresy in Sweden in the Middle Ages.[80]

9 Vadstena as a Pilgrim Destination

There are several first-hand accounts of the constant stream of pilgrims who visited the church and graves at Vadstena, and regular reports of miracles.[81] The fact that by the mid-15th century between six and eight priests were required, in addition to the confessor and priest brethren, to hear confession and

74 RS: 7.
75 Riksarkivet, SDHK 24377.
76 *Vadstena Diary*, 86–87 (123) and 144–45 (238).
77 *Vadstena Diary*, 136–37 (221).
78 Lundén, *Sankt Nikolaus av Linköping*.
79 *Vadstena Diary*, 232–35 (519).
80 Jarl Gallén, "Kättare," in *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid* (Malmö: 1956–78), vol. 10: 69–74.
81 Christian Krötzl, *Pilger, Mirakel und Alltag. Formen des Verhaltens in skandinavischen Mittelalter (12.–15. Jahrhundert)* (Helsinki: 1994), 82–87, 96–98.

give absolution to the pilgrims who came from the archdiocese is indicative of the level of activity. The Vadstena brethren had permission from the Swedish bishops to grant indulgences to visitors from dioceses across the land.[82]

Particular feasts, such as Birgitta's or Katarina's translations, and the designated years of jubilee or indulgence attracted crowds of people to the town, among them high-ranking prelates and other distinguished visitors. In addition, people from different social classes and backgrounds sought to make their way towards Vadstena at the annual Church feasts and for the major indulgences. Most pilgrims were simple folk who traveled in person to fulfill a promise and give thanks for a miraculous cure or after a mishap to seek help by prayers and supplications, or in hope of conversion and cure. Some came bearing chains because they had been condemned to a penitential pilgrimage for a crime committed.[83]

Pilgrims often had with them their parish priests, relatives, or neighbors, who could authenticate the truth of an alleged miracle as having taken place. From 1370 onwards, an astonishing number of witnesses, including priests, made themselves available in Vadstena to write down the miracles.[84] It was normal for anyone who had been cured of an injury or sickness from the brink of death to relate the miracle publicly as a mark of gratitude, sometimes even under oath. In the later Middle Ages written attestation seems to have been required.[85] Representatives were sent to Vadstena by those who were prevented from coming in person but could afford to buy their indulgence by making a pious vow. In this way, in 1450, an Englishman came with a letter of recommendation, sent by the previous chancellor of the university of Oxford, who had prayed to St Birgitta and, in a vision, had seen her face as it was depicted in the English daughter-house in Syon.[86]

The thousands of pilgrims who flocked to Vadstena gave the abbey votive offerings of precious metals and wax, as well as goods and money. In 1376, the archbishop donated a silver reliquary arm, and a middle-class housewife and mother of 11 children in Vadstena who had experienced problems with breastfeeding received help from Katarina as soon as she hung up two silver breasts

82 Riksarkivet, SDHK 25766.

83 See Fritz in Lindqvist and Söderström, *600 år i Vadstena*, 110–18; Clara Nevéus, "Botvallfart under svensk medeltid," in *Ny väg till medeltidsbreven. Från ett medeltidssymposium i Svenska Riksarkivet 26–28 november 1999*, eds. Claes Gejrot, Roger Andersson, and Kerstin Abukhanfusa (Västervik: 2002), 299–312.

84 Anders Fröjmark, *Mirakler och helgonkult. Linköpings biskopsdöme under medeltiden* (Uppsala: 1982); Krötzl, *Pilger, Mirakel und Alltag*.

85 Riksarkivet, SDHK 15521–15523.

86 Riksarkivet, SDHK 25683.

in front of Katarina's grave.[87] Walking sticks and metal chains spoke for themselves. Most common of all was the wide array of wax images. The poor, who could not afford gifts, could compensate by reading a fixed number of prayers or working for the abbey for a limited period.[88] The fact that a papal *nuntio* threatened those in charge of the abbey with excommunication if they did not send to the holy seat the promised wax, fur, and large sums of money that were due to be collected during the jubilee year of 1390 (at Vadstena this was observed in 1394) is indicative of the extent of the expectations.[89] Pilgrims who came to Vadstena took home small metal badges to fasten to their clothing as souvenirs and amulets as evidence of their visit. These souvenirs survive in five different versions.[90] All have an image of St Birgitta sitting at a writing desk, and with the name Vadstena.

10 The Abbey, Town, and Royal Power

The prohibition on country trading in 14th-century Sweden meant that trade could only be conducted in towns and not in the countryside.[91] When the royal estate changed hands and the monastic community began to take shape, Vadstena was not a town, and therefore it was difficult to support the inhabitants of the former estate lands as it turned into a monastic estate and to support the crowds of pilgrims. The town-like settlement grew up spontaneously and on the banks of lake Vättern around the south-west and west sides of the abbey.[92]

A request from the abbey and local inhabitants was granted that allowed Vadstena to be given its town charter. The letter of royal privilege dates from 8 December 1400.[93] The freedom of the abbey and town was thenceforth reconfirmed at every change of regent or regime. Since the town was built on abbey ground, the abbey had immediate rights to land rent and day-work on the farm, while most of the buildings were privately owned by the citizens. Within just a few years, by 1404, all the taxes and revenues that would have been due

87 See Fritz in Lindqvist and Söderström, *600 år i Vadstena*, 115.

88 Fritz in Lindqvist and Söderström, *600 år i Vadstena*, 116.

89 *Vadstena Diary*, 60–61 (83).

90 Lars Andersson, "Sankta Birgittas pilgrimsmärken," in *Medeltiden och arkeologin. Festskrift till Erik Cinthio*, eds. Jes Wienberg et al. (Lund: 1986), 110–15; Lars Andersson, "Birgittinsk vallfart: Peregrini Sanctae Birgitte," in *Birgitta, hendes værk og hendes klostre i Norden*, ed. Tore Nyberg (Odense: 1991), 377–95.

91 Hugo Yrwing, "Landsköp," in *Kulturhistorisk lexikon*, vol. 10: 282–91.

92 See Fritz in Lindqvist and Söderström, *600 år i Vadstena*, 83–85 (for a map, see p. 40).

93 Riksarkivet, SDHK 15518.

to the crown in a market town like Vadstena were conferred on the abbey. The town bailiff was nominated by the abbey and not as elsewhere by the king. The collection of the land rents, taxes, etc., had to be audited before the abbess. Since she could not leave the abbey, her authority was exercised by a representative, principally the bailiff, an administrator, and the estate manager. In this respect, the town was unique in medieval Sweden.

In 1400, after Vadstena had acquired its status as a town, the citizens swiftly had to appoint a council, mayor, and councilors, and build a town hall. They also were required to have a copy of the town law and a special book that recorded judgements and protocols. These books unfortunately disappeared when a Danish battalion ravaged the town in the 1560s and caused the town archive containing its correspondence to burn down.[94] In addition they required an official metal seal, the oldest version of which is first attested in 1417 and shows an image of St Birgitta holding her writing implements at her writing desk with the inscription *Sigillum ciuitatis Wathstenensis*. The mayor and councilors were in principle coopted into office, but in practice they were appointed by the abbess, and throughout the Middle Ages they were great producers of letters, sometimes in collaboration with the town-dwellers.[95]

Since there were different legal and administrative procedures between town and country, the town boundaries had to be properly demarcated and signposted. The actual town settlement never came to fill the entire acreage, but its extent in different periods is indicated by traces of older and newer trenches in front of a palisaded embankment. The first trench dates from the beginning of the 15th century and a later one from 1467. Although Vadstena was a monastic town and its citizens were exempt from military service, except when there was a general summons to arms, the town was not immune to military interventions. The town was vulnerable and was threatened on several occasions, and it was the point of departure for a few military expeditions, although the *Vadstena Diary* gives no indication about whether the abbey was damaged in any way before the Reformation.[96]

Despite the physical proximity between the town council and abbey, surprisingly, much was settled in writing between them. The well-crafted and intricately detailed letters, many in large format, provide evidence that great weight was attached to the formal judicial process. They concern, for instance, the establishment of an altar in the hospital, the regulation of the land

94 Gunnar Lindquist (ed.), "Daniel Rantzaus dagbok," in *Östergötland 1986, Meddelanden från Östergötlands länsmuseum* (Linköping: 1986).

95 See Fritz in Lindqvist and Söderström, *600 år i Vadstena*, 120, 124–28.

96 The diary ends with the year 1545.

around the town's church and its late medieval fortification. All the town's institutions—like the parish church of St Per and its college of priests, the school, and the hospital—were under the obedience of the abbey.

The relationship between the abbey and the town was not without its tensions. In part this was because the town's secular system of regulation clashed with the abbey's spiritual system. The disputes between the abbey and the town about who had the right to sit in judgement on errant pilgrims illustrate this.[97] Further, the inhabitants were obliged not only to pay rents for the plots and make payments for farming on the abbey lands, but they also had to do some day-work, pay tithes, and, where appropriate, pay fines to the abbey. In fact, the abbey acted much as the crown would have done in Vadstena. The rivalry between the abbey and citizens, which was an ongoing theme in Vadstena's medieval history, ultimately came down to the question of the rightful ownership of the town land. Despite all this, many of the citizens' daughters chose to enter the abbey, especially as the aristocratic interest in the order had waned in the later Middle Ages.

The right to the fines paid by local people, which the abbey had been granted earlier, was extended in 1414 to apply to all royal power over the abbey's properties, inhabitants, and all tenants and servants in the whole kingdom. Even if the abbey had been granted royal power and estate incomes from Vadstena and all its properties, the king and crown naturally retained the ultimate authority and power over the whole enterprise.

11 Vadstena Abbey and the Lutheran Reformation

The parliament of Västerås in 1527 is generally acknowledged to be the starting point of the Lutheran Reformation in Sweden.[98] Although the churches and monasteries in Sweden lost much of their political, economic, and

97 Birgitta Fritz, "Prästkollegiet vid Vadstena sockenkyrka S:t Per," in *Kyrka och socken i medeltidens Sverige*, ed. Olle Ferm (Stockholm: 1991), 401–27; Norborg, *Storföretaget Vadstena kloster*, 225–40.

98 On the abbey and the Reformation, see Gunnar Olsson, *Stat och kyrka i Sverige vid medeltidens slut* (Gothenburg: 1947); Andreas Lindblom, *Vadstena klosters öden. Till 600-årsminnet av Birgittas död* (Vadstena: 1973), 123–41; Hans Cnattingius, "Vadstena klosters sista tid," *Annales Academiae regiae scientiarum* (Uppsala: 1969); Gustaf Ivarsson, *Johan III och klosterväsendet* (Lund: 1970); Alf Härdelin, *Kult, kultur och kontemplation* (Skellefteå: 1994); Fritz in Lindqvist and Söderström, *600 år i Vadstena*, 198–205; Martin Berntson, *Klostren och reformationen. Upplösningen av kloster och konvent i Sverige 1523–1596* (Skellefteå: 2003).

judicial powers, there was no break with Rome or sudden adherence to German Lutheranism. In 1523, King Gustav I (1523–60), also known as Gustav Vasa, had begun to extort silver and money from the abbey. That had scarcely anything to do with Lutheran impulses, but rather with the king's foreign debt.[99] Soon, however, religious arguments started to play a part, even though doctrinal changes were slow to take root. In terms of its theology and dogma, the overarching structure of the Catholic Church was preserved until the 1530s. And the administration of the church estates was not changed until the 1540s. The first step was taken in 1539, when the king appointed a German layman as a superintendent with the task of dismantling the Swedish Church from the international Catholic Church, to create a German-styled Church under the dominion of a princely ruler. Since 1536 it had been decided that the priests were to preach the gospel, celebrate mass in Swedish, and conduct the sacraments using the Swedish liturgy. According to the *Vadstena Diary* the mass in Swedish was imposed in 1540, and all ceremonies and saints' feast days were forbidden apart from those that called for peace.[100] Further, the king's bailiff was authorized to enter the sacristy to make an inventory of the relics, chalices, monstrances, and offertory plates. The list of such silver valuables that was later gathered from the church's many altars is extensive.[101]

In April 1543, the king himself put a seal on both letter cabinets in the library, and his soldiers removed countless books and other items, presumably to the newly built castle in the town. Linked to this was the fact that church property and estates as well as other sources of income had now fallen to the crown and were administered by the king's bailiffs. Thus, the abbey's archive was collected along with the land registers and all the documents relating to land ownership. The remaining books were not collected until 1619, and they were divided between the royal chancellery and Uppsala University.

The abbey, which still employed many people, became dependent on various means of support, gifts, loans, and alms, since the payments due from the king's bailiffs were irregular and unreliable. In October 1543, the abbey was affected by a chapter meeting at which the sacrifice of the mass, consecrated water, the monastic cope and dress, and many other things were all banned.[102]

99 Michael Roberts, *The Early Vasas: A History of Sweden 1523–1611* (Cambridge, U.K.: 1968).

100 *Vadstena Diary*, 456–58 (1173).

101 *Vadstena Diary*, 458–59 (1175). Olle Källström, *Medeltida kyrksilver från Östergötland förlorat genom Gustav Vasas reduktion år 1540* (Stockholm: 1935), 140–47, and *Medeltida kyrksilver från Sverige och Finland förlorat genom Gustav Vasas reduktioner* (Stockholm: 1939), 279–86.

102 *Vadstena Diary*, 460–61 (1190 and 1192).

A general ban on pilgrimages, consecrated water, incense, monstrances, etc., was laid down by the Parliament of Västerås in 1544.

The very last entry in the *Vadstena Diary* relates that the town-dwellers tore down the southern wall of the abbey in 1545.[103] Some of the sisters left the abbey on the king's instructions, and the last brethren were driven out in 1550. The last remaining sisters therefore must have had difficulty in holding masses and in maintaining their contacts with the curia and their daughter-houses. The abbey was now forbidden from taking in novices and was left to die a slow death. The policy was not, however, to expel the monks and nuns directly, as that would have provoked a reaction nationally. The families of the higher nobility, including the king's own family, had ancient bonds with the abbey, and their respect for the institution was great. The king indeed often visited Vadstena for official meetings. At the same time the monastic community was exposed to local harassment, and it fared badly when the Danish army ravaged and burned Vadstena in 1567 and 1568.[104]

Sometimes, the abbey was given certain assurances about its future. But the tide had begun to turn for the little Catholic enclave. The 1570s and 1580s had seen a brief Catholic revival under King Johan III and his Catholic Polish wife.[105] The royal couple stayed in Vadstena for long periods, with the queen's Catholic *pater*. The number of sisters increased, their material and spiritual situation improved, and until 1593 they were led by a powerful abbess. As the Catholic Reform movement gained ground there was hope for a revival of the old faith. The king tried to restore the liturgy of the Church year and a pious way of life. However, this does not mean that he sought to reintroduce the medieval or the Tridentine order.

On the instigation of Pope Gregory XIII, the general secretary of the Jesuit Order, Antonio Possevino, visited Sweden in 1578 and 1580.[106] His visit to Vadstena on the latter date was in the highest spirit of the Counter-Reformation. Vadstena became in its last ten years of existence a mission station for Jesuit disciples, with a small school attached. But Possevino did not succeed in reforming the abbey in accordance with what had been decided at the Tridentine Council or in organizing any priestly training. The lack of priests had long been a problem for the sisters, and enclosed within the cloister they had for decades lived almost completely cut off from continental Catholicism. The

103 *Vadstena Diary*, 462–63 (1197).

104 Lindquist, "Daniel Rantzaus dagbok," 30 and 56.

105 *Vadstena Diary*, 460–61 (1190 and 1192).

106 Umberto Benigni, "Antonius Possevinus," in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, eds. Charles Herbermann et al., 15 vols (New York: 1907–14), vol. 12.

secret dealings between the king and the papal *nuntio* would never lead to a reconciliation with Rome.

On the first Sunday of Lent 1580, the royal couple's presence was celebrated with a solemn communion service, and the sisters were able to make or renew their monastic vows, and the abbess and prioress were confirmed in office.[107] The proceedings finished with a 40-hour prayer session, which was a mark of Counter-Reformation piety. When the abbess wrote a letter in Latin to Rome a month later to express thanks for the consideration and gifts that she and individual Catholics had received through Possevino, this was to be the abbey's last letter to the papacy.[108]

The abbey remained a fortress of Catholic resistance a little longer, but with increasing difficulties. The death knell came at the parliament of 1595, where it was decided that all improper activity ("*allt missbruk där*") at the abbey should be put to an end, and those who remained had to leave.[109] It is not known exactly what happened when the abbey closed, even though several accounts exist.[110] According to one, the sisters were given advance warning and had time to pack all that remained of their valuables, hide the relics, and depart. According to another account, the secular authorities on the spot told them to renounce the Catholic faith and to accept evangelical Protestantism. It is also recounted that 11 sisters were led out of the abbey, and via the port of Söderköping they traveled to the Polish daughter-house of Danzig. There is a further suggestion that the abbess and several sisters remained in Vadstena until 1596, and that they received support and did not leave for Danzig until the autumn of that year. Whatever the case, the nuns at Vadstena do not appear to have disappeared completely from the scene, because the town annals record a case from 1605 involving a nun who had stolen from the abbey's stores.[111]

Translated by Bridget Morris

107 Fritz in Lindqvist and Söderström, *600 år i Vadstena*, 203.

108 Cnattingius, "Vadstena klosters sista tid," 269.

109 Berntson, *Klostren och reformationen*, 248.

110 See, for example, Robert Geete, "De sista nunnorna i Vadstena," in *Personhistorisk tidskrift* 16 (1914): 12–17; Hedström, "One Customary to Rule Them All," 359.

111 Fritz in Lindqvist and Söderström, *600 år i Vadstena*, 205.

CHAPTER 6

Birgitta and Her *Revelations* in the Sermons of the Vadstena Brothers

Roger Andersson

In medieval art, St Birgitta of Sweden is often depicted with some recurring attributes, emphasizing certain of her qualities as a saint. Such qualities, it can rightly be assumed, represent those aspects of her sanctity that the artists or the commissioner considered most important and thus were anxious to convey. Common attributes, for example, were the monastic habit indicating that the saint was the founder of a religious order, the pen, the book, the angel showing Birgitta as a visionary writer and prophet, and the hat and staff representing her as a pilgrim.[1] Besides these pictorial motifs, which follow her *Vita* closely, Birgitta's *Revelations* offer us yet another set of images of the saint. Here, Birgitta is sometimes represented as, if not a politician, then at least someone who clearly expresses her views on contemporary events and rulers, be they knights, priests, kings, or popes. This can be seen as an inherent part of her prophetic vocation, but the very content and tone of her criticism are also shaped by the fact that she was a member of the aristocracy. In other places, Birgitta's motherhood, her quality of *mater familias*, or her role as bride (both carnal and celestial) is underlined.[2]

1 Mereth Lindgren, *Bilden av Birgitta* (Höganäs: 1991); Mereth Lindgren, "Den heliga Birgitta—pilgrim i livet och konsten," in *Birgitta av Vadstena. Pilgrim och profet 1303–1373*, eds. Per Beskow and Annette Landen (Stockholm: 2003), 167–76. See also Chapter 7 by Maria H. Oen in the present volume.

2 See, for example, Birgit Klockars's groundbreaking study *Birgitta och böckerna. En undersökning av den heliga Birgittas källor* (Stockholm: 1966), with useful indexes to the *Revelations*. More exhaustive indexes are now available in Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Denis Searby, with Introductions and Notes by Bridget Morris, 4 vols (Oxford: 2006–15), vol. 4: 353–98. See also Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: 2001); Birger Bergh, *Heliga Birgitta. Åttabarnsmor och profet* (Lund: 2002); Tore Nyberg, "Birgitta politikern," in Beskow and Landen, *Birgitta av Vadstena*; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Saints, Poets, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378–1417* (University Park, Pa.: 2006), especially Ch. 2; Olle Ferm, *Olaus Petri och Heliga Birgitta. Synpunkter på ett nytt sätt att skriva historia i 1500-talets Sverige* (Stockholm: 2007), especially 13–33; Unn Falkeid, *The Avignon Papacy Contested: An Intellectual History from Dante to Catherine of Siena* (Cambridge, Mass.: 2017), especially Ch. 5. See also Chapter 3 by Falkeid in the present volume.

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Our knowledge of the contemporary representations of Birgitta, the view that developed in the century following her death, and the medieval reception of the *Revelations* would not, however, be complete if we did not also include another type of source material, namely the sermons of the brothers in the motherhouse of Birgitta's monastic order in Vadstena. Not only does the impressive sermon legacy left behind by the Vadstena brothers, which until only a few decades ago received little scholarly attention, have the potential to bring us closer to the ideals and practical life of the Birgittine abbey itself, but the preaching of the brothers is also an indispensable source of knowledge about the late medieval conception of Birgitta.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how Birgitta is presented in the sermons. What is actually said about her, and how is that used in the context of sermons? Secondly, how do the preachers use her *Revelations*? It is a well-known fact that many preachers in their sermons quoted them extensively, but what is the function of such quotations in a homiletical context, and what is their role from a rhetorical point of view?

Although the Vadstena sermons had been known to scholars earlier, the completion of the catalogue of the collection of manuscripts at Uppsala University Library in 1995 gave impetus to further exploration of this source material.[3] It has been estimated that the medieval library of Vadstena Abbey may have consisted of some 1500 books, about 450 of which are still extant. Of these, *c*. 150 manuscripts contain sermons. Not all were written at Vadstena. Many books were either purchased abroad or copied from foreign exemplars and subsequently delivered to Sweden. Yet some 5000 sermons in the C-Collection of Uppsala University Library can be ascribed to the Vadstena priests.[4]

3 MHUU.

4 Roger Andersson and Stephan Borgehammar, "The Preaching of the Birgittine Friars at Vadstena Abbey (*ca.* 1380–1515)," *Revue Mabillon*, n.s. 8 (vol. 69) (1997): 206–36, especially 213–15. For a bibliography on Birgittine preaching up to *c*. 2001, see Roger Andersson, *De birgittinska ordensprästerna som traditionsförmedlare och folkfostrare* (Stockholm: 2001), 12–19. Among the studies that have appeared since 2001 may be mentioned Roger Andersson, "Birgittas revelationer i Vadstenabrödernas predikningar," in Beskow and Landen, *Birgitta av Vadstena*; idem, "From Popular Preaching to Monastic Reading," *Birgittiana* 18 (2004, printed 2006): 135–46; idem, "Översättaren som predikant. Clemens Petri och svenska språket," in *Dicit Scriptura. Studier i C-samlingen tillägnade Monica Hedlund*, ed. Sara Risberg (Stockholm: 2006); idem, "Drömmen om den heliga kvinnan. Johannes Mattheis Katarinapredikan år 1521," in *Medeltidens mångfald. Studier i samhällsliv, kultur och kommunikation tillägnade Olle Ferm*, eds. Göran Dahlbäck et al. (Stockholm: 2008); idem, "'*Liberasti me a perdicione*.' A Sermon for Katarina of Vadstena from 1521," *Medieval Sermon Studies* 54 (2010): 27–37; idem, "Sermon Manuscripts of Different Kinds," *Medieval Sermon Studies* 55 (2011): 31–44; idem, "Popular and Academic Preaching on Good Friday. A Comparative Study," in *Swedish Students at the University of Vienna*, eds. Olle Ferm and Erika Kihlman (Stockholm: 2011); idem, "Magister

The large number of surviving sermons suggests that the preaching office was an intrinsic part of the spiritual life of the order. But the questions of how, and to what extent, are not easily solved. The manuscripts themselves only rarely give explicit information regarding the audience and when, where, or if at all, a specific sermon was actually preached. But when the extant material is analysed in light of contemporary preaching regulations, a clearer picture emerges. The architecture of the interior of the abbey church allowed for the priests to separately address the brothers, the sisters, and laypeople, such as pilgrims visiting the church. And sermons intended for popular preaching, *ad populum*, seem to have been by far the most frequent type included in sermon collections. These were normally written down in Latin and used as models for the priests in the preparation of their speeches in a language their listeners could understand.

The basic prescriptions on preaching are given in the rule of the Birgittine Order (*Regula Salvatoris*). In Chapter 15 it is stated:

> The thirteen priests should only apply themselves to the divine office, to study and to prayer without involving themselves in other activities or tasks. They should explain the gospel of the day in their native language every Sunday with everyone in attendance. They should also preach publicly on every solemnity preceded by a vigil of fasting on bread and water as well as on other feasts that have vigils.[5]

Mathias och predikan i Vadstena kloster," *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift 115* (2015): 174–90; idem, "Emotional Imagery in Anticlerical Preaching," in *Tears, Sighs and Laughter*: *Expressions of Emotions in the Middle Ages*, eds. Per Förnegård et al. (Stockholm: 2017); idem, "Messenger Manuscripts and Mechanisms of Change," in *Continuity and Change*: *Papers from the Birgitta Conference at Dartington 2015*, eds. Elin Andersson et al. (Stockholm: 2017); Maria Berggren, "Exhibeatis Deo hostiam vivam. Biskopsvisitation och systrapredikan i Vadstena kloster," in Risberg, *Dicit Scriptura*; Stephan Borgehammar, "Svensk senmedeltida påskpredikan. Tre exempel," in *Svensk påskpredikan genom tiderna*, eds. Christer Pahlmblad and Sven-Åke Selander (Skellefteå: 2010); Monica Hedlund, "Handskrifter från Prag i Vadstena—lästes de någonsin?" *Annales Societatis Litterarum Humaniorum Regiae Upsaliensis* (Uppsala: 2005); idem, "En Vadstenabroders referensbibliotek," in *Medeltidens mångfald*; idem, "The Use of Model Sermons at Vadstena: A Case Study," in *Constructing the Medieval Sermon*, ed. Roger Andersson (Turnhout: 2007); idem, "A Vadstena Preacher Using Paste and Scissors," *Medieval Sermon Studies* 55 (2011): 45–54; Alf Härdelin, *Världen som yta och fönster. Spiritualitet i medeltidens Sverige* (Stockholm: 2005); idem, "Vadstenabrodern Acho Iohannis' Prothemata. Några iakttagelser rörande hans predikokonst," in Risberg, *Dicit Scriptura*; and Susan Powell, "Cox Manuscript 39: A Rare Survival of Sermons Preached at Syon Abbey?" *Medieval Sermon Studies* 52 (2008): 42–62.

5 RS: 15.173–174: Capitulum xv. Sacerdotes vero isti tredecim tantummodo diuino officio, studio quoque et oracioni vacare debent nullisque aliis se implicare negociis vel officiis.

The second piece of legislation concerns the duties of the Birgittine priests and is found in the *Revelaciones extravagantes*. Chapter 23 contains an amplification of the cited chapter in the rule:

> Christ speaks: "Those who preach my truth should use few and simple words based on the study of Holy Scripture in order that people who travel in from a distance can understand them and are not made weary by long-winded repetitious oratory. They should not use tortuous language like flatterers do or multiply the distinctions and divisions of their arguments or use sophisticated leonine rhymes; instead they should adapt everything to the capacity of the listeners. What the common people do not understand is usually said more in order to impress than to edify. So, on Sundays, the preachers of this order should read out and explain the gospel of the day. They should discuss the Bible along with these words of mine and of my beloved Mother and my saints; the lives of the Fathers; the miracles of the saints; the profession of faith; as well as countermeasures against temptations and vices, all of this according to the capacity of the listeners. My dear Mother was altogether straightforward; Peter was unlearned; Francis a plain man from the countryside. Yet they did more good to souls than eloquent teachers, for they were full of love for souls."[6]

Over the course of time the *Regula* was subject to a number of other learned commentaries and (sometimes) disputes, handed down in a variety of documents. When the customary of the Vadstena brothers, the *Liber usuum*, was

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Qui quidem omni die dominico euangelium illius diei in ipsa missa omnibus audientibus in materna lingua exponere tenentur cunctisque solempnitatibus, quarum vigilias seu profesta ieiunant in pane et aqua, atque aliis quibuscumque festis vigiliam habentibus publice predicare."

6 Extrav.: 23.1–4: "Christus loquitur: 'Qui predicant veritatem meam, debent habere verba simplicia et pauca, in leccione sanctarum scripturarum fundata, vt homines venientes delonge capere sufficiant et non attediantur in prolixitate et declamacione verborum superfluorum. Nec debent proferre verba contorta more adulancium, nec multiplicare incisiones et distincciones capitulorum seu subtilitates leoninitatum, sed omnia moderare iuxta capacitates audiencium. Quia que populus simplex non intelligit, solet plus mirari quam edificari. Ideo, si est dominica, predicantes in ista religione proponant euangelium diei et eius exposiciones, Bibliam et ista verba mea et dilecte matris mee sanctorumque meorum, Vitas patrum et miracula sanctorum, simbolum fidei, remedia quoque contra temptaciones et vicia secundum vniuscuiusque capacitatem. Nam mater mea carissima simplicissima fuit, Petrus ydiota, Franciscus rusticus, et tamen plus profecerunt animabus quam magistri eloquentes, quia perfectam caritatem ad animas habuerunt.'"

written sometime around the middle of the 15th century, the authors could benefit from this corpus of comments on, and clarifications of, the rule in order to provide precise regulations for the daily life of the brothers in the all-male convents of the order, including instructions on preaching.

Of particular interest for the status of the *Revelations* is an explicit statement in *Extravagantes* 23 that the preachers were required to quote from them in their sermons. We shall return to this statement below.

1 The Image of Birgitta

Well over 100 sermons for the different feast days of St Birgitta have been preserved.[7] The two most important of these, judging from the number of extant sermons, were the Canonization (7 October) and the Translation (28 May), but there are also a number of sermons for the Nativity (23 July), as well as a large group for which the occasion is not specified. The three Birgitta days were added to the calendar of Linköping in 1391–92, i.e. immediately after her canonization in 1391. That the Canonization and the Translation feasts were occasions of particular importance both for adoration and for preaching is evident from the fact that they are given the highest degree of solemnity (*totum duplex*) in a Vadstena calendar from the beginning of the 15th century.[8]

Monica Hedlund has previously examined the image of Birgitta as it appears in a selection of sermons intended to be preached on the feast days of the saint.[9] The different motifs she identifies are common in sermons for female saints in general. This shows that already in the earliest sermons the Birgittine preachers were eager to make their saint conform to established hagiographical patterns and the traditional qualities of sainthood. One such recurring image is Birgitta as a widow. This motif was crucial already in the solemn sermon preached by Pope Boniface IX on the occasion of the Canonization festivities in October 1391. Other qualities are also emphasized: Birgitta's wisdom (*sapientia*), strength (*fortitudo*), diligence (*diligentia*), persistence (*sedulitas*), and fear of God (*timor Dei*). Likewise, Birgitta is sometimes portrayed as a prophet, one who preaches the joy of the elect and the severe judgement of

7 The catalogue records 115 sermons. See MHUU, vol. 8 (Spezialregister), 25. In addition to this, only a couple of Birgitta sermons are known from archives other than the University Library of Uppsala.

8 Andersson and Borgehammar, "The Preaching of the Birgittine Friars," 222.

9 Monica Hedlund, "Vadstenapredikanter om Birgitta," in *Heliga Birgitta—budskapet och förebilden. Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vadstena 3–7 oktober 1991*, eds. Alf Härdelin and Mereth Lindgren (Stockholm: 1993).

the unrighteous, and who claims divine inspiration for her teachings. The attention given to Birgitta's prophetic qualities is particularly interesting since the question of whether her *Revelations* were inspired by God (or, as adversaries asserted, by the devil) was much debated at the great church councils in the 15th century.[10] As a complement to Hedlund's study, in the following article I shall dwell briefly on three sermons composed and presumably also preached in Vadstena Abbey.

The first sermon is found in UUB, C 259, a manuscript which itself does not give any information about its author or scribe. Palaeographical studies, however, in combination with an annotation on the last leaf (fol. 116v) have revealed that it was written by the important preacher Thorirus Andreae, who completed the book a few days after the feast of St Mark in April 1400.[11] On the basis of the rubrics to the sermons and the order in which they have been entered into the manuscript, I have attempted to reconstruct the days on which Thorirus fulfilled his preaching duty in the years between 1392 and 1400. Thus, the Birgitta sermon on fols 59r-61r was probably preached on 7 October 1397.[12] Its theme is *Ora pro nobis quoniam mulier sancta es* ("Pray for us, for you are a holy woman," Judith 8:29), and the main structure is the same as in the group of sermons referred to above, which focus on Birgitta's wisdom, strength, diligence, and fear of God. In order to illustrate these different qualities of the saint, the preacher refers not only to the *Revelations* but also to miracles performed by the saint or to episodes from her life.

A wise woman, Thorirus claims, is a woman who builds a house, but a foolish woman will pull down with her hands that which is built (see Prov. 14:1). A wise architect (*sapiens architectus*), however, makes sure that the house is built on a solid foundation. This foundation, the preacher continues, is true humility, which was constructed by Christ when he said, "learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart" (Matt. 11:29). And Birgitta placed herself (*collocauit*) on Christ as on a firm rock, and from love she came to despise all her riches and the vanities of the world. After this, the following episode from her *Vita* (*Sciendum est*) is recounted:

10 See the exhaustive discussion in Sahlin, *Birgittta of Sweden*, and the example from C 317 given below.

11 C 259, fol. 116v: "Anno Domini M°cd° infra octauas Marci." For a description of the manuscript see MHUU, vol. 3: 186–87. When quoting from unedited sermons I have in a few cases benefited from the preliminary transcriptions produced within the research project *Vadstenabrödernas predikan* ("The Preaching of the Vadstena Brothers"); all such readings have been checked against the manuscript(s). In all other cases the transcriptions are my own.

12 For details see Roger Andersson, "Sermon Manuscripts of Different Kinds," 39–41.

> Immediately after the death of her husband she divided all her belongings among her sons and the poor, and changed the way she dressed and her entire life, and she would have done more if she had not been hindered by the revelation that commanded her to make a pilgrimage to Rome. Since she was despised by the nobles because of her sudden change and the unworthiness of her clothing, she replied: "I do not begin because of you, nor do I take my leave because of you. I had decided in my heart to tolerate injurious words. Pray therefore for me, so that I may persevere!"[13]

It is interesting to note how the promising concept of Birgitta's wisdom is transformed by a few exegetical tricks into the more traditional virtues of humility and generosity in almsgiving.

The same procedure is repeated in the remaining sections. When it is stated, for example, that Birgitta was a strong woman (*mulier fortis*), Thorirus argues that her strength consists in an ability to overcome adversities. He tells us that "many women are weak and cannot endure sickness or other misfortunes; they are effeminate, cry often, and are inclined to slander."[14] But Birgitta, by contrast, was patient in suffering any discomfort.

In a sermon on the theme *Hec vidua erat* ("And she was a widow," Luke 2:37) by Johannes Borquardi (d. 1447), one of the most proficient preachers in the history of the abbey, we can see this method applied systematically. In a protheme to this sermon (UUB, C 331, fols 97v–103v), intended for the second vesper service on the feast day of Birgitta's canonization, the preacher claims that there are three states (*status*) in the world in which a woman can be saved, namely matrimony, widowhood, and the virginal state. Birgitta represented all three of these during her life, not least virginity, which she kept "in a perfect, unstained and irreproachable way."[15] In the main body of the sermon, Johannes identifies three types of widowhood: the honorable widowhood of respected

13 C 259, fol. 59r–v: "Mortuo marito statim distribuit omnia bona sua inter filios et pauperes, mutans habitum et vitam fecissetque maiora, nisi obstetisset, quod preceptum sibi fuit per reuelacionem peregrinari ad Romam. Cumque ipsa contempneretur a nobilibus propter subitam mutacionem et vilitatem habitus, respondit illa: 'Nec propter vos incipio, nec propter vos dimitto. Statueram enim in corde meo tolerare verba iniuriosa. Orate igitur pro me vt possim perseuerare'." Cf. AP, 88.

14 C 259, fol. 59v: "Multe sunt mulieres fragiles ad sustinendum infirmitates vel aduersitates, molles ad flendum, prone ad maledicendum."

15 C 331, fol. 98r: "Mater nostra et patrona sanctissima beata Birgittta perfecte et immaculate ac irreprehensibiliter compleuit et seruauit virginitatem." For a description of the manuscript see MHUU, vol. 4: 244.

wives, the miserable widowhood of poor people, and the detestable widowhood of sinful souls. What Johannes teaches us about widowhood is supported by ample evidence from a variety of episodes in Birgitta's life. The widowhood of respected wives (*viduitas honorabilis*) can be compared to a turtledove who never finds a new partner once its first has died. Johannes provides us with a lengthy exposition on this topic, which, according to him, was the very essence of the moral dignity of an honorable widow. This is further demonstrated by the way Birgitta, after the death of her husband, Ulf, took off her wedding ring and threw away the token of their union.

Johannes continues by telling us that there are three things a widow should avoid, and five things for which she should strive. What he says about Birgitta in especially the first of these two sections is quite revealing about his ideal of feminine sanctity with its extreme emphasis on the humility and self-effacement so prevalent in Vadstena preaching; it is perhaps also revealing about contemporary attitudes towards women in general.

The first thing a widow should flee is idleness (*ociositas*). Widows should always pursue what is good, or, as St Jerome puts it: "Do always something good so that the devil finds you occupied!"[16] This is a commonplace, but in the second and third sections Johannes becomes more specific. A widow should also avoid wordiness and loquacity. And however much the garrulousness of men is reproachable, it is even more reproachable for women, and most of all for widows.[17] The third thing to flee is curiosity (*curiositas*). A widow is not supposed to run from one house to another, or from one feast to another. Nor is she supposed to look around too much in the street or in the church. Instead she should remain in her house or abide in the church.[18] This virtue was indeed observed by Birgitta.

2 The Function of the Quotations

Recent investigations into the Vadstena material have made it overwhelmingly clear that the preachers often quote from the *Revelations* of their saint. In fact, this is done to such a high degree that the practice has come to be regarded as

16 C 331, fol. 100r: "Semper aliquid boni facito vt te dyabolus inueniat occupatum" (even if the feminine form "occupatam" would fit better in this particular context).

17 C 331, fol. 100r: "Quamuis verbositas reprehensibilis sit in viris, precipue tamen in feminis et maxime in viduis."

18 C 331, fol. 100r: "Tercium quod fugere debent vidue est curiositas vt non currant de domo in domum vel de conuiuio in conuiuium; nec multum in platea vel ecclesia circumspicere sed in domo sua vel in ecclesia manere."

one of the major characteristics of the Birgittine sermon.[19] If we return for a moment to Chapter 23 in *Revelaciones extravagantes*, it is interesting to note that the preachers are required by Christ to present "these words of mine and of my beloved Mother"—words that without any doubt refer to the *Revelations*, where Christ or Mary often speaks in the first person. Thus, we can clearly see that the use of the *Revelations* in the sermons appears to be prescribed in the Birgittine legislation. In many of the sermon collections produced during the first decades of the Birgittine Order this practice is well attested. Suffice it here to mention the collections by Johannes Giurderi Præst (d. 1391), who was perhaps the most renowned preacher from the pioneering days of the order; his contemporary Styrkarus Thyrgilli (d. 1416), former parish priest in Kuddby in the diocese of Linköping; and Thorirus Andreae, quoted above. In the collections of these three, the *Revelations* are quoted if not always extensively, at least frequently and regularly.[20] This is also the case in the many anonymous collections written during the same period.[21]

In a previous study I have demonstrated that there is significant variation in the frequency with which books of the *Revelations* were quoted. The most popular is certainly the first book, from which almost one third of the total number of citations are taken, followed by the sixth and the fourth books, with about one fifth each. The fifth book of the *Revelations*, the so-called *Liber questionum*, is hardly represented at all, presumably on account of its more learned and theoretical character.[22] It was also possible to identify an early and a later phase. In the early phase, the quotations are not completely integrated into the sermons, but rather added either at the end of the entire sermon or at the end of one or several of its principal sections. In the course of the 15th century, however, the citations become a more integrated part of the preacher's voice. They are cleverly adapted to the surrounding theological, rhetorical, and linguistic contexts. Of special interest is their rhetorical function, i.e. their role in the process of successful communication between preacher and audience. The *Revelations* are used to convey *teachings* about matrimony, confession, the Trinity, and many such things pertaining to Christian faith. Accounts of the cleansing of the souls in Purgatory and of the eternal torments in Hell were meant to arouse *fear* in the hearts of the listeners. Some preachers use Birgitta's texts in order to bring *comfort* to the distressed, often at the end of their

19 Andersson and Borgehammar, "The Preaching of the Birgittine Friars," 212.

20 See UUB, C 270, fols 2r–154r (Johannes Giurderi Præst); C 391, fols 98v–123r, 133r–174v (Styrkarus Thyrgilli); and C 259, fols 4r–116v (Thorirus Andreae).

21 Such as the collections contained in UUB, C 85; C 305; C 352; and C 395.

22 Andersson, "Birgittas revelationer i Vadstenabrödernas predikningar."

sermons. From a rhetorical point of view, it is wise to leave the audience in a mood of trust and confidence even if their sins and misbehavior have been severely reproached earlier in the sermon.

In a recent study, Hedlund offers a more detailed account of how quotations from the *Revelations* were used.[23] Her essay consists of a detailed analysis of two Vadstena sermons written in the middle of the 15th century. The sermons in question are expanded versions from a widespread collection of model sermons. Hedlund points out that the most important feature of this adaptation is that the Birgittine preachers not only omit unnecessary repetition, but also a good number of biblical and other authorities, and, significantly, these omissions are replaced by quotations from the *Revelations.* The latter are sometimes used as *auctoritates* on a level with Scripture, and sometimes as *exempla*.

In the present study, the concepts of *auctoritas* and *exemplum*, introduced by Hedlund, have been retained when discussing the function of the quotations. These categories have the obvious advantage of covering at least some aspects of the classical rhetorical duties of the speaker. The function of *auctoritas* often involves precisely imperative statements aimed at the instruction of the audience and *exempla* are normally used to touch the feelings of the listeners: negative examples to induce fear and consciousness of one's own sin, positive examples to produce feelings of relief, hope, and trust. In addition to these, another function can be added: the use of the *Revelations* to structure, if not an entire sermon, at least a substantial part thereof, such as one of its main sections (*principalia*). In accordance with its function, I shall call this third category *structura*.

3 Auctoritas

The question of the authority the preachers ascribed to the *Revelations* is closely connected to the question of their authority in a broader context. This subject is treated more exhaustively in other chapters of this book. It may be enough in this context to remind the reader of the fact that the divine origin of Birgitta's texts was certainly not self-evident to all. A good number of doubtful theologians raised their voices in opposition to what they considered the pretentious claims of this Swedish woman. A host of Birgitta's defenders joined the battle and mobilized their efforts and theological expertise in order to save the reputation of their saint, whom they considered the prophetess of truth. These were the realities of life for the Birgittines. The very basis for the foundation

23 Hedlund, "The Use of Model Sermons at Vadstena."

of the order, the Heavenly Revelations of their saint, so loved and venerated by many, were at the same time questioned by others, so much so that the *Revelations* in some milieus were judged as speaking against the canonical Scriptures themselves.

The authenticity of the *Revelations* together with other matters concerning the Birgittine Order, such as indulgences, were debated at the Councils of Constance and Basel.[24] In 1436 a formal judgement was pronounced in Basel by Cardinal Louis d'Aleman that disapproved of both the title of Birgitta's work, *The Heavenly Book of Revelations* (*Liber celestis revelacionum*), and its contents, although the judge did not formally condemn the work as heretical, nor did he intend to question Birgitta's sanctity or canonization.[25] Of special interest for our purpose here are the passages in which the judge comments on the use of the *Revelations* and on their authority in relation to Scripture. Regarding the first, he forbids anyone "to presume to pronounce or disseminate in public such things, in their present form in those books, without a Catholic modification," and, regarding the second, he declares that it is prohibited to equate the authority of the *Revelations* with that of the Gospels.[26] We should remember that none other than Master Mathias of Linköping writes in his defense of Birgitta, known as *Stupor et mirabilia*, that Christ's revelation to Birgitta "is even more amazing than the one by which he showed himself in the flesh."[27] The implication of the 1436 judgement, therefore, would be that the priests of the Birgittine Order were no longer allowed to quote from the *Revelations* in their sermons, and they definitely were not to put them on a par with Scripture. Since we already know that the *Revelations* were quoted during the whole period from which we have preserved sermons, we may believe that the brethren more or less disregarded this section of the judgement. This is well in line with the assumption made by Anna Fredriksson, who argues that they "never in their hearts nor in their own writings recognized the judgement."[28] The preachers seem to have continued in the way in which they were accustomed,

24 See further Anna Fredriksson Adman (ed.), *Heymericus de Campo: Dyalogus super Reuelacionibus beate Birgitte. A Critical Edition with an Introduction* (Uppsala: 2003). See also Thomas M. Izbicki, "The Sins of the Clergy in Juan de Torquemada's Defence of the Revelations of Saint Birgitta," *Birgittiana* 20 (2005): 249–62.

25 See Chapter 4 by Anna Fredriksson in the present volume.

26 Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 31.

27 Prol. M., 21: "Sane stupendior est hec apparicio illa, que se per carnem monstrauit." The text was included by the principal editor of the *Revelations*, Alfonso of Jaén, as a prologue to the corpus.

28 Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo*, 48; Izbicki, "The Sins of the Clergy," 250–51. In 1484 Pope Sixtus IV reversed parts of the cardinal's decree.

and one can guess that they felt somewhat justified in doing so. Discussions about how the judgement should be interpreted seem to have given way to a strategy aiming at pretending it had never been issued.

I shall now turn to the sermons themselves and explore a few citations in which the *Revelations* indeed have the status of *auctoritas*. One remarkable preacher, although as yet unidentified, is characterized by a more extensive use of the *Revelations* than any of his contemporary fellow brethren. His sermons are recorded in two manuscripts (UUB, C 317, and C 389), believed to have been written during the first half of the 15th century.[29] The sermons of the anonymous preacher are infused with quotations to such an extent that Stephan Borgehammar has assumed that "his promotion of Birgitta should perhaps be seen in relation to the criticism levelled against her and her Order at the council of Basel."[30] It seems that he was especially eager to promote the idea that Birgitta was indeed a true prophet. In one sermon, for example, he gives no less than twelve definitions of "prophet," and for each of these it is proven by hagiographic material, as well as by passages extracted from the *Revelations*, that Birgitta was qualified to be called a prophet.[31] In another sermon (C 389, fols 115v–122r) intended for one of the most important days of pilgrimage to Vadstena, the feast of St Peter *ad vincula* (1 August), the preacher provides a long enumeration of symbols to which different sinners may be likened, appearing in different places in the *Revelations*.[32] This is a good example of how the *Revelations* could be actively used for the preparation of sermons, thus also illustrating their authority. I shall now briefly mention two other sermons by this preacher. The first (C 317, fols 50r–52v) is intended for the sixth Sunday after Easter. The preacher uses all his rhetorical skill to prove that Birgitta was indeed a true prophet.

> By means of the prophetic spirit with which she [Birgitta] had been endowed in a wonderful way, this bride of Christ was worthily assigned not the lowest place among the multitude of prophets. … Through her Christ blames transgressions of every kind; makes threats to the obstinate, consoles those who make progress, makes promises to those who persevere,

29 MHUU 4 (1991), 127 and 566. Hedlund, "Vadstenapredikanter om Birgitta," 326 n. 31, suggests a dating to 1420–50.

30 Stephan Borgehammar, "Preaching to Pilgrims. *Ad vincula* sermons at Vadstena Abbey," in *A Catalogue and Its Users: A Symposium on the Uppsala C Collection of Medieval Manuscripts*, ed. Monica Hedlund (Stockholm: 1995), 95.

31 Hedlund, "Vadstenapredikanter om Birgitta," 320. On the subject of Birgitta as a prophet, see also Chapter 2 by Anders Piltz in the present volume.

32 This long extract is published and translated in Andersson, "Emotional Imagery," 269–70.

> predicts the future to those unamenable to good advice, feels pity for the foolishness of men, calls for penance, and threatens through the justice of God the judgement of both God's punishment and severity and temporal and eternal pain.[33]

A bit further on in the sermon, he claims that six things are required by the human mind in order to receive divine revelation: the illumination of divine grace, the kindling of the mind by means of inner devotion, the active consideration of divine law, the perfection of the mind in good works (which are seven, i.e. the endowment of the mind with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit), and the liberation of the mind through love in God.[34] The preacher sums up this passage with the following conclusion:

> Birgitta perfectly had all those qualities, which can be inferred from the series of her revelations. But it is very sad that so many do not rejoice in the coming of the Holy Spirit but that they rather resist, which is clear from book IV of the Revelations, Chapter 10.[35]

As we see, the *Revelations* are the ultimate proof of Birgitta's prophetic vocation, and in the tenth chapter of Book IV, in which Christ deplores the morals of the inhabitants of Rome, the preacher finds evidence for the unwillingness of many to rejoice in the Holy Spirit.

In a sermon for the Nativity of Mary (UUB, C 389, fols 142r–144v) on the theme *Que est ista que progreditur quasi aurora consurgens* ("Who is she that comes forth as the morning rising?" Canticles 6:9), our preacher claims that the Virgin can be compared to the dawning daybreak for a number of reasons.

33 C 317, fol. 51r–v: "Sponsa igitur Christi prophecie spiritu mirabiliter dotata digne locum optinet non infimum in numero prophetarum. … Arguit Christus per eam omnium statuum preuaricaciones; et comminatur obstinatis, consolatur proficientes, promittit perseuerantibus, predicit futura insuasibilibus, compatitur stulticie hominum, vocat ad penitenciam, comminatur per iusticiam Dei iudicium tam punicionis et districcionis Dei quam dampnacionis temporalis et eterne."

34 C 317 fols 51v–52v: "Notandum igitur quod ad diuinam reuelacionem optinendam vi requiruntur in humana mente. Primum est diuine gracie illuminacio. … Secundum est ipsius mentis per internam deuocionem inflammacio. … Tercium est diuine legis actualis consideracio. … Quartum est ipsius mentis in septemplici bone accionis disposicione perfeccio. … Quinto requiritur mentis per vii dona sancti Spiritus habilitacio. … Sextum est ipsius mentis per amorem in Deo quietacio."

35 C 317, fol. 52v: "Has condiciones perfecte habuit beata Byrgitta, vt ex serie reuelacionum eius colligi potest. Sed dolendum valde est, quod multi Spiritus sancti aduentui non congratulantur, sed pocius resistunt, vt patet 4 Reuelacionum capitulo 10."

To prove his points he does not rely on any other authoritative texts—not the Bible, the Church Fathers, or anything else—only five long extracts from the *Sermo angelicus*—the sermon allegedly dictated to Birgitta by an angel—and the *Revelations*. Nothing could be more strongly indicative that this preacher believed in the divine inspiration of this particular text.

The credited authority of the *Revelations* is evident in many other sermons. In the collection UUB, C 299, written at Vadstena towards the end of the 14th century, an anonymous sermon to the clergy (*sermo ad clerum*) is recorded (fols 248r–252r). The *prothema* (the introductory part of the discourse) discusses the role of a good preacher, and the theme of the righteous and the unrighteous priest persists throughout the sermon. It is pointed out how important it is to resist the temptations of the devil. The preacher quotes from Ephesians (6:11): "Put you on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil." After this follows:

> This armour is divine love by which the devil is defeated, according to the angel in the *Revelations*: "Love for God kills the devil" [Rev. I: 54.26]. He would rather die a hundred times than [see] that man performed the least good charitable work before his God, so envious and evil is he. Love, therefore, in the most secure way defends against the darts of the devil, according to the *Revelations*: "Love protects against enemy missiles and makes a man more even-tempered in enduring the evils that threaten, more agile in honoring God and more fervent in divine works, invincible in adversity, calm in hope, steadfast in the tasks he undertakes." [Rev. IV: 74.17][36]

What the preacher does here is to use the *Revelations* as authoritative support for the statements that the armor of God, divine love, defeats the devil and protects man from his insidious spears. He could instead have chosen to use Scripture to support his point, but he takes recourse in Birgitta, as if he were free to choose either at will. The *Revelations* are placed on the same level as Scripture. Both have the capacity to justify the points the preacher wants to convey, since both are regarded as authentic expressions of God's intention.

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36 "Hec armatura est diuina caritas qua uincitur dyabolus, unde angelus in Reuelacionibus: 'Caritas ad Deum interficit dyabolum.' Mallet enim cencies mori, quam quod homo minimum bonum caritatis exhiberet Deo suo. Sic inuidus est et maliciosus. Caritas igitur securissime defendit contra iacula dyaboli. Vnde in Reuelacionibus: 'Caritas defendit contra tela inimici et animequiorem reddit hominem ad tollerandum mala ingruencia, et agiliorem efficit ad honorem Dei et feruenciorem ad diuinos labores, inuictum facit in aduersitatibus, longanimum in spe, et perseuerantem in inceptis.'" Maria Berggren (ed.), *Homiletica Vadstenensia ad religiosos et sacerdotes* (CCCM) 229 (Turnhout: 2009), 251.

A similar example from the same period can be provided by the already mentioned Johannes Præst. In a sermon for the eighth Sunday after Trinity (UUB, C 270, fols 110v–113v) Johannes refers to the words of St Augustine, namely that love is the only virtue by which the sons of the heavenly kingdom can be distinguished from the sons of perdition. After elaborating on the dreadfulness of the pains of the latter, the preacher sets out to prove that he who does not act according to the love of God does not deserve to enter the kingdom of heaven:

> According to what Christ says in the second heavenly book, Chapter 5: "Only a person who has charity can obtain my kingdom" [Rev. II: 5.21]. I Corinthians 13[:1–3]: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels" etc. up to "and if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits me nothing."[37]

Here, the words of Christ in the second book of the *Revelations* are quoted together with the words of St Paul.

Even though Johannes Borquardi (see above) was professed in 1428, the main part of his time as one of the 13 priest brothers and preachers (he also served as confessor general for a short period, 1443–44) occurred after the 1436 judgement. Yet, as we can see from his sermons, also he quotes from the *Revelations* in the same way as did his predecessors. In a sermon written for St Peter *ad vincula* and recorded in UUB, C 331 (fols 167r–172v), Johannes Borquardi speaks about different forms of chains or bonds (*vincula*), such as that of obedience. By this bond, he explains, man was chained in baptism to keep and to observe the Ten Commandments.[38] As we see in the following quotation, taken from the passage on the seventh Commandment, Johannes employs quotations from the *Revelations* as *auctoritates* in the same context and with the same function as the quotation from the Church Father Augustine.

37 C 270, fol. 113r: "Vnde dicit Christus ii libro celesti v: 'Nullus, nisi qui caritatem ad me habuerit, regnum meum optinere poterit.' 1 Cor. xiii: 'Si linguis hominum loquar et angelorum' etc vsque 'Si distribuero in cibos pauperum omnes facultates meas, et si tradidero corpus meum ita vt ardeam, caritatem autem non habeam, nichil michi prodest.'" For a description of this manuscript see MHUU, vol. 3: 232–33.

38 C 331, fol. 170r: "Hiis vinculis siue isto vinculo obediencie ligari debet quilibet christianus ad tenendum et obseruandum precepta Dei et hoc fit in baptismo, quando homo abrenunciat dyabolo et omnibus pompis eius et ligatur vinculo obediencie ad obediendum Deo et eius preceptis."

> We see this in the robbers, both here in this kingdom and in other places. In the future, they will be punished with eternal damnation if they do not emend, as Augustine says: "Sin is not forgiven unless emended and removed." And in the *Revelations* Christ says: "What do men of the world think, those who have an evil faith, who retain what is unjustly acquired? Surely not that they will enter Heaven. Definitely, they will not do this any more than Lucifer!" [Rev. VI: 85.4][39]

As we see, Johannes Borquardi's aim of demonstrating that stealing will be severely punished receives ample support from the writings of Birgitta.

The function of *auctoritas* is also clearly discernible at a much later period, as is evident in the following example taken from a sermon written by Nicolaus Ragvaldi. Nicolaus entered the abbey in 1476 and served as confessor general both in Vadstena and in the daughter house in Reval (Tallinn). He died in 1514.[40] This particular sermon was probably preached (or intended to have been preached) to the sisters around the turn of the century 1500. The sermon (UUB, C 303, fols 303v–312r) takes its departure from a quotation from the antiphon sung on the feast of the Nativity of Mary: *Cum iocunditate natiuitatem sancte Marie celebremus, vt ipsa pro nobis intercedat ad dominum Iesum Christum*. The passage below is included in a section in which Nicolaus discusses the reasons why we should celebrate the Nativity of the Virgin with joy.

> The second reason why we should celebrate the birth of Mary with joy is the splendor of her life, because the most holy life shone out in her according to what the Church sings today: "Today the Virgin Mary is born whose glorious life brought light to the world." And the life of Mary was deservedly most holy, since she began to love God from her childhood, which is shown in the first book of the *Revelations*, Chapter 10 in the beginning, where it is read: "When I first learned and came to an understanding of the existence of God, I was always concerned about my

39 C 331, fol. 172r: "Sicut videmus in raptoribus hic in regno et alibi. In futuro punientur eterna dampnacione nisi restituerint, quia dicit Augustinus: 'Peccatum non dimittitur nisi restituatur ablatum'. Et in Reuelacionibus dicit Christus: 'Quid credunt homines in mundo male fidei possessores, qui retinent iniuste obtenta. Numquid credunt quod intrabunt celum? Certe non magis quam Lucifer!'"

40 On Nicolaus Ragvaldi, who is famous not only for his impressive sermon legacy, including several collations directed to the sisters at Vadstena (*collaciones ad sorores*), but also for his many translations of religious literature into Old Swedish, see further Andersson, *De birgittinska ordensprästerna*, 213–15; and Berggren, *Homiletica Vadstenensia*, XLIII–XLV, with further bibliographical references.

> salvation and religious observance. When I learned more completely that God himself was my Creator and the judge of all my actions, I came to love him deeply, and I was constantly alert and watchful so as not to offend him in word or deed" [Rev. 1: 10.1]. Here this is said. And all this happened to Mary in her childhood, but certainly not only because of God but also as a result of the careful attention of her parents. The good education of the child makes her honorable. And the parents of the blessed Virgin were just before God and men, as is shown in the first book of the *Revelations*, Chapter 9. Look there![41]

Above, by means of a few examples, it has been argued that the *Revelations* enjoyed a remarkably high degree of authority among the priest brothers at Vadstena. My intention has been to demonstrate that the *Revelations* are quoted on a par not only with the Church Fathers but also with the canonical Scriptures. Nothing in the sources indicates that this changes after the judgement pronounced at the Council of Basel in the 1430s. It goes without saying that not only do the preachers attain authority *from* the *Revelations*, but this is also a means for the priests to lend authority *to* them, and thus to demonstrate that Birgitta herself is an authority in these harsh times.

Although the *Revelations* are frequently quoted in a manner that likens Birgitta's text to Scripture, in one particular respect, however, the *Revelations* never replace the Bible: no quotation taken from them is ever used to provide the point of departure, the *thema*, of a sermon. Hence, they never actually challenge the fundamental notion of a biblical foundation for all Christian preaching.

Some preachers show a remarkable skill in combining different quotations and adapting them to the surrounding text of the sermon. This might necessitate alterations to Birgitta's own words to make the citation fit within the

41 UUB C 303, fol. 306r: "Secundo merito cum iocunditate celebrabimus natiuitatem Marie propter eius vite claritatem, quia sanctissima vita relucebat in ea; iuxta illud quod hodie canit Ecclesia dicens: 'Hodie nata est virgo Maria, cuius vita gloriosa lucem dedit seculo.' Et merito vita Marie sanctissima erat, quia ab infancia cepit Deum diligere, vt patet libro i Reuelacionum, capitulo x in principio, vbi sic legitur: 'Ego, inquit Maria, a principio, cum audirem et intellegerem Deum esse, semper sollicita et timorata fui de salute et obseruancia mea. Cum autem audissem plenius ipsum Deum esse creatorem meum et iudicem de omnibus actibus meis, intime dilexi eum et omni hora timui et cogitaui, ne eum verbo vel facto offenderem.' Hec ibi. Et vnde hec Marie in sua infancia euenerunt, certe non solum a Deo, sed eciam a diligenti cura parentum. Bona enim educacio prolis facit eam honestam. Sed parentes beate Virginis fuerunt iusti coram Deo et hominibus, vt patet libro primo Reuelacionum, capitulo ix; vide ibi." For a description of the manuscript see MHUU, vol. 4: 18.

syntactical context of the sermon—another way in which the treatment of the *Revelations* is distinguished from that of Scripture. A passage having a clear and defined meaning in the *Revelations* may be used in quite another context in the sermon. For instance, in a citation discussed below, Birgitta criticizes the habits of evil and unjust "priests," but when the passage is used in the sermon, the noun "priests" is instead rendered by "sinners" or other synonyms. The quotation is taken from a revelation (I: 47) in which Birgitta formulates a harsh criticism of the clergy, whereas the preacher uses it in quite another, albeit related, context. Sometimes, the preachers make additions to the text of the *Revelations*. These are normally amplifications or intensifications, but the alterations can also provide moral instruction, close to the outer limits of tropological interpretation.

4 Exemplum

There is plentiful evidence for the exemplary function of the *Revelations* in Vadstena sermons. UUB, C 305, probably written around the turn of the century 1400, contains a collection of Sunday sermons that has not been much studied. According to the catalogue, the manuscript was written in Sweden, with no further specification. Given that the book was kept in the library of the abbey, and since the most distinguishing feature of the sermons is the vast number of Birgitta quotations, we can safely assume that it was in fact written at Vadstena.[42] In a sermon for the eighth Sunday after Trinity it is shown how Birgitta's texts can be used both as an illustration of the pains of the sinner, and as a means for the preacher to elaborate on a central metaphor to make his point clearer to the audience. After stating the theme ("Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing," Matt. 7:15), the preacher identifies three kinds of false prophets, the first being those who use simulated speech and speak deceitful words. He rounds off the section by quoting from the *Revelations*, Book I, in order to make clear what will happen to such people:

> And thus, by such flattering words he falls into mortal sins, such as gluttony, drunkenness, and fornication. Without doubt, such people will incur horrible pain, as Christ says in the *Revelations* regarding someone damned: "he attracts everyone to himself by the sweetness of his words and then leads them into eternal perdition from whence they can never

42 MHUU, vol. 4: 30; Monica Hedlund, "Katillus Thorberni. A Syon Pioneer and His Books," *Birgittiana* 1 (1996): 67–87, at 85; Andersson, *De birgittinska ordensprästerna*, 48, n. 10.

> escape. I will remove his evil from the earth and hand him over to the unquenchable oil, where he will be tormented without end. And demons will impose on him the bitterness of hell for the sweetness of his words, so that he will endure as many punishments as the number of souls he led to perdition." [Rev. I: 17.2–4][43]

This is rather straightforward, and the story told by Birgitta resembles a homiletical *exemplum*, so frequent in medieval popular preaching, which often had the function of providing a moral lesson (for example, inducing fear or transmitting hope) related to some topic in the sermon or some theological concept.[44] The preacher then continues his exegesis of Matthew 7:15–21. This pericope (a liturgical reading for a particular day, normally the Epistle or Gospel) also contains the well-known words about the good tree and the bad tree, a symbol that is further elaborated upon as an example of a life in true humility and love:

> Here follows: "a good tree brings forth good fruit" [Matt. 7:17], and naturally a bad tree brings forth the opposite. … You should rather be like the tree about which Christ teaches you in the *Revelations*: "O bride, that is the Christian soul, you ought to be like a tree that is well rooted. This tree is your soul whose principal root is good will according to the will of God. From this root of will as many virtues are brought forth as there are roots in the tree. The principal root from which the others grow should be strong and thick and deeply rooted in earth. And, likewise, your will should be strong in patience, thick in divine love, and deeply planted in true humility." [Rev. VI: 30.3–5][45]

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43 UUB, C 305, fol. 7r: "Et sic de huiusmodi verbis blandis cadit in mortalia peccata, commessacionem, ebrietatem, fornicacionem etc. Talis sine dubio incurrit horribilem penam, sicut dicit Christus in Reuelacionibus de quodam dampnato: 'Per dulcedinem verborum omnes sibi attrahit et ita ducit in eternam perdicionem, vt numquam possint inde fugere. Ideo auferam maliciam eius de terra ipsumque tradam olle inextinguibili, vbi sine fine cruciabitur et ei demones facient inferni amaritudinem pro dulcedine verborum, vt tot penas sustineat quot animas traxit ad dampnacionem.'"

44 On the *exempla* genre see, for example, Claude Bremond, Jacques Le Goff, and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L"exemplum"* (Typologie des Sources du Moyen Âge Occidental. Fasc.) 40 (Turnhout: 1982).

45 C 305, fol. 7v: "Sequitur 'arbor bona fructus bonos facit.' Naturaliter et mala arbor econtrario. … Esto igitur pocius talis arbor, vt Christus te docet in Reuelacionibus: 'O sponsa, id est christiana anima, oportet te esse sicut arborem bene radicatam. Hec arbor anima tua est, huius radix principalis est voluntas bona secundum voluntatem Dei. De hac enim radice voluntatis tot virtutes procedunt quot sunt radices in arbore. Radix vero principalis

We have already seen how the *Revelations* can convey fierce warnings against sinners. Indeed, horrifying stories about the torments in hell are quite frequent in Birgitta's writings. As an illustrative example of how these are used in the sermons I would like to quote a long passage from a sermon on the same theme as the preceding one. The reason I quote this sermon at such length is that I want to give a vivid picture of what a genuinely popular sermon preached by one of the most productive and original preachers could in fact look like. Besides, the extensive and conscious use of the *Revelations* is here brought to the fore as in few other cases. This sermon (C 313, fols 307r–313v) is recorded by Jacobus Laurencii, who was priest brother from 1446 until his death in 1460. No fewer than six large sermon volumes in his own hand have been preserved to our day.[46] Jacobus discusses the three traditional enemies of man, i.e. the devil, the world, and the flesh. In the section treating the third of these, the preacher points out that flesh inspires man to lust, and he puts forward Jezebel as an example of a false prophetess who taught and seduced the servants of God to commit fornication (see Apoc. 2:20). He then continues:

> In the same manner, this false prophet, that is the flesh, arouses and incites man to pleasures and lust and many other carnal and abominable sins. It says to the human heart: "See, you are young and beautiful, healthy and strong, and you still have a good time to live. The world is delightful and created for delights. Therefore, there is no damage if you live according to your own will, because a man may in his youth for some time live in pleasure and after, in his old age, he can make penance. So you should now practice the voluptuousness of the flesh, dine sumptuously, get drunk, joke, and be luxurious. Rest calmly, sleep sweetly, and whatever nature pleases and requires, grant all that to nature in sufficient amount. This is the joy and the happiness which you should long for." Behold, these are the incitements and the delights, which this false prophet, the flesh, thrusts upon the human heart. … Luxury generally affects all,

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de qua alie succrescunt debet esse fortis et grossa, debet esse profunde in terra radicata. Sic voluntas tua debet esse fortis in paciencia, grossa in diuina caritate et profunde depressa in vera humilitate.'" For the symbol of the tree in Vadstena sermons, see also Andersson, *De birgittinska ordensprästerna*, 137–64.

46 For details see Andersson, *De birgittinska ordensprästerna*, 212. Copies or different versions of this particular sermon are extant in a few other manuscripts from about the same time. For a discussion of the relations between these texts see Roger Andersson, "From Erfurt and Lyons to the Parish Church of Björkvik. The Friars of Vadstena Abbey as Cultural Transmittors," *Mediaeval Studies* 60 (1998): 185–218; and Roger Andersson, *De birgittinska ordensprästerna*, 108–12. For a description of C 313 see MHUU, vol. 4: 104.

laymen and literate, monks and priests, young and old, poor and rich. This happens to such an extent that now only a few people may be found who are not affected and contaminated by this destructive vice of lust. In fact, many are so rooted in and accustomed to luxury that they never wish to cease so long as nature is satisfied. No one can convert them, they do not fear God's severe judgement, nor the eternal pains of hell. They would rather abstain from God, reject the heavenly kingdom, and submit themselves to eternal torments, than recover from their cursed lust. … Oh, such miserable and condemnable blindness! Oh, how terrible and intolerable their judgement will be, since they shall be judged in their disorder, disgrace, and malediction. As is written in the first heavenly book, Chapter 47: "Now let me tell you their sentence. Their sentence is condemnation. David condemned those who were disobedient to God, because he was a righteous prophet and king, and not out of anger or bad will or impatience, but out of justice. I too, who am greater than David, condemn them not out of anger or bad will, but out of justice. Accursed be their eyes because they will not see the vision of God but the darkness and pains of hell. Accursed be their ears because they will not hear my words but the shouts and horrors of hell. Accursed be their sense of taste, because they will not taste the joy of my eternal gifts, but perpetual bitterness. Accursed be their sense of smell, because they will not smell the scent of the most delightful things in my kingdom, which exceed all aromatic things, but they will smell the stench in hell which is more bitter than gall and worse than sulphur. May they be accursed by earth and sky and every brute creature. These obey and glorify God, whereas they have shunned him. Therefore, I swear by the truth, I who am the truth, that if they die like this with such a disposition, neither my love nor my virtue will ever encompass them. Instead, they will be forever damned" [see Rev. I: 47.40; 43–44; 47–48]. … Behold in what way this false prophet, the flesh, in a wretched manner deceives those who obey him and plunges them into the torments of hell. As is written in the second heavenly book, Chapter 8, about a certain knight "who loved the temple of his body in its every lust, and who had the power he wanted" [Rev. II: 8.29]. Once having left the body, the soul said to it: "Tell me, where now are the sights to delight my eyes that you promised me, where is the pleasure you showed me, where are the pleasant words that you bade me use?" The devil was there and answered: "The promised sights are no more than dust, the words are but air, the pleasure is but mud and rot. Those things are of no value to you now." The soul exclaimed then: "Alas, alas, I have been wretchedly deceived! I see three things. I see him who

was promised to me under the resemblance of bread. He is the very King of kings and Lord of lords. I see what he promised, and it is indescribable and inconceivable. I hear now that the abstinence he recommended was really most useful." Then, in an even louder voice, the soul cried out "woe" three times: "woe is me that I ever was born! Woe is me that my life on the earth was so long! Woe is me that I shall live in a perpetual and never-ending death!" [Rev. 11: 8.33–38] And at once the demons withdrew with the soul to hell. Therefore, beware of this false prophet, that is the flesh, and other false prophets whom we should seek to avert, those "who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" [Matt. 7:15]. They demand nothing but to destroy, disperse, waste, and slaughter. May the true and glorious prophet the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, forever blessed, protect, and defend us both in body and soul from them. Amen.[47]

47 C 313, fols 312v–313v: "Sic iste falsus propheta, scilicet caro, docet et incitat hominem ad libidinem et fornicacionem et ad alia multa carnalia et abhominabilia peccata. Suggerit enim cordi hominis: 'Ecce iuuenis es et pulcher, sanus et fortis, et habes adhuc bonum tempus ad viuendum et mundus delectabilis est et ad delectacionem creatus. Ideo nichil obest, si ad tempus vixeris secundum velle tuum, quia homo debet ad tempus aliquod in iuuentute ad libitum viuere et postea in senectute fortiter penitere. Ideo nunc excerceas te in carnis voluptate epulare, inebriare, iocare, luxuriare. Quiesce molliter et dormi suauiter, et quidquid natura appetit et requirit, sufficienter ei tribue. Ecce hoc est gaudium et felicitas, quam desideres.' Ecce ista sunt incitamenta et oblectamenta, que iste falsus propheta, scilicet caro, ingerit cordi humano. … Quia luxuria fere omnes inuoluit, laycos et literatos, monachos et presbiteros, iuuenes et senes, pauperes et diuites. Ita quod iam pauci inueniuntur, qui non sunt infecti et contaminati ab isto pestifero vicio luxurie. Reuera multi sunt ita radicati et vsitati in luxuria, quod numquam vellent cessare, si sufficeret natura. Nullus potest eos conuertere, non timent districtum Dei iudicium, non eternum inferni supplicium, ymmo magis volunt carere Deo et amittere regna celestia et obligare se ad eterna tormenta, quam resipiscere a luxuria sua maledicte. … O quam miserabilis et dampnabilis cecitas! O quam terribile et intolerabile erit eorum iudicium, quia in confusione et obprobrio et maledicione iudicabuntur, sicut habetur primo libro celesti capitulo xlii. Dicit Christus: 'O sponsa mea, dico tibi iudicium eorum. Horum iudicium est maledicio, sicut maledixit Dauid eis, qui non obedierunt Deo, qui cum esset iustus propheta et rex, non maledixit ex ira vel mala voluntate seu ex impaciencia, sed ex iusticia Dei. Sic ego, qui sum melior Dauid, maledico eis non ex ira vel mala voluntate, sed ex iusticia. Maledictus ergo erit visus eorum, quia non videbunt visionem Dei in se, sed tenebras et penas inferni. Maledicte sunt aures eorum, quia non audient verba mea, sed clamorem et horrorem inferni. Maledictus est gustus eorum, quia non gustabunt de bonis meis eternis gaudium, sed amaritudinem eternam. Maledictus est odoratus eorum, quia non odorabunt odorem illum suauissimum in regno meo excendentem omnia aromata, sed fetorem in inferno habebunt amariorem felle et peyorem sulphure. Maledicti sunt a celo et terra et ab omnibus creaturis insensatis, quia ipsa obediunt Deo et laudant et isti spreuerunt. Propterea iuro in veritate mea, qui sum veritas, quod si moriuntur in

Both long extracts from the *Revelations* in the sermon just quoted are used in connection with the preacher's harsh warnings against the pleasures of the flesh. It is precisely the very vivid way in which the consequences of such a moral attitude are depicted that lends them an exemplary function.

5 Structura

The medieval sermon was normally clearly structured with a theme, its division or distinction (sometimes on several levels) and the principal parts (*principalia*) developing from the way the theme was divided. In the examples discussed so far, the quotations from the *Revelations* are either attached to or integrated into this already existing textual structure. In some cases, however, a long quotation from the *Revelations* could in itself include a distinction, for example, an analysis of a concept in its constituent parts. In this way, a revelation, or a part thereof, can sometimes appear as a "mini-sermon," as it were. Such a piece could also be used in the development of the discourse of a full sermon. I call this function *structura*. The idea is that structural parts in the quoted passage (such as enumerations or distinctions of various kinds) are used as such also in the sermon, where they can sometimes constitute one member in the sermon's macro-structure. I have not found any examples of members of such distinctions being used as principal parts of a sermon (*principalia*), i.e. as a structuring

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tali statu et in tali disposicione, qua nunc constituti sunt, numquam caritas mea nec virtus concludet eos, sed sine fine dampnabuntur.' … Ecce quomodo iste falsus propheta, scilicet caro, sibi obedientes miserabiliter decipit et ad inferni supplicia dimergit. Sicut habetur 2 libro celesti capitulo viii, de quodam milite, qui dilexit templum corporis sui et in omni voluptate dominabatur vt voluit: Sed anima eius egressa de corpore, ipsa loquebatur ad corpus dicens: 'Dic michi vbi est nunc visio oculorum delectabilis, quam michi promisisti, vbi voluptas, quam michi ostendisti, vbi verba delectabilia, quibus me vti precepisti?' Affuit mox demon et respondit: 'Visio promissa non est nisi puluis, verba non sunt nisi aer, voluptas non est nisi lutum et putredo. Hec autem nichilum tibi valent.' Tunc clamabat anima: 'Heu heu, quam miserabiliter decepta sum. Ego video tria. Video enim illum, qui in similitudine [panis] michi promittebatur, ipse est rex regum et dominus dominorum. Ego video quod promisit et hoc est indicibile et inexcogitabile. Audio iam abstinenciam quam suasit fuisse vtilissimam.' Deinde alcius clamabat cum tribus ve: 'Ve,' inquit, 'quia natus sum! Ve, quia tam longa fuit vita mea super terram! Ve, quia victurus sum in morte perpetua, que numquam potest terminari!' Et statim demones recesserunt cum anima ad infernum. Attendite igitur ab isto falso propheta, scilicet carne, et aliis falsis prophetis, de quibus iam precautum est, qui 'veniunt in vestimentis ouium, intrinsecus autem sunt lupi rapaces,' quia nichil aliud pretendunt nisi rapere, dispergere, perdere et mactare, a quibus nos protegat et defendat in corpore et anima ille verus et gloriosus propheta Dominus Iesus Christus Dei filius in secula benedictus. Amen."

device on the highest level. Instead they are rendered on lower levels, but in such a way and so organically connected within the already existing macrostructure that it can be presumed that they were in fact considered as an integral part of the sermon and communicated as such to the audience. Sometimes marginal notes may be of help to understand the procedure. In a sermon (UUB, C 327, fols 110r–119v) written by the already mentioned Nicolaus Ragvaldi, after having first discussed how the seed of the Word of God is disregarded by the hypocrites, the preacher concludes that "also the birds in the sky, that is the demons who are said to dwell in the air, eat the seed of the Word. This consuming, as was said before, is their suggestion, by which they take the Word of God away from the memory of listeners."[48] Seven demons are then enumerated: Lucifer, Mammon, Beelzebub, Asmodeus, Satan, Leviathan, and Behemoth, each connected to a deadly sin. The section treating the last of these begins:

> The seventh is Behemoth who induces man to sloth which makes him delight in that which is vain and disregard what is eternal, neglect the commandments of God out of indifference, fight against spiritual benefits out of malice, and be attracted to forbidden things out of inconstancy of the mind, all this to such an extent that spiritual consolations become a scornful contempt to him. About this in book six of the Heavenly Revelations. A certain soul was accused in the divine judgement of three kinds of sloth: "First he was very lazy to carry out good deeds in your [i.e. the judge's] honor and to fulfill your commandments. He wasted his time in physical relaxation, because he cared more about his physical comfort and pleasure. Secondly, he was slothful in thought. When your good spirit inspired compunction or spiritual insight in his heart, he found it tedious and turned his mind away from spiritual meditation. But he found every worldly delight pleasant and alluring. Thirdly, he was slothful of mouth, that is in praying and speaking for the benefit of others and for your glory. However, he was keen in indecent language" [Rev. VI: 39.25–28]. So much for this. See how evil these birds are. Apply this![49]

48 C 327, fol. 114v: "Sequitur, quod eciam volucres celi, id est demones, qui dicuntur esse in aere isto caligioso, commederunt illud, quorum commestio, vt supra dictum, est eorum sug[g]estio, qua verbum Dei tollitur a memoria audiencium."

49 C 327, fol. 117r–v: "Septima est Seemoth inducens hominem ad accidiam, vt in vanis delectando se occupet nil de eternis curando, vel per torporem precepta Dei negligendo, vel per maliciam spiritualia bona impugnando, vel per euagacionem mentis circa illicita deducendo, vt ei sint fastidio spirituales consolaciones. Vnde libro vi celestium Reuelacionum. Anima cuiusdam accusabatur in iudicio Diuino de triplici accidia. Et primo sic. 'Primo in opere accidiosus erat ad operandum bona opera ad honorem tuum et ad mandata

The final words ("Apply this!") are directed to the preacher himself, without doubt as part of his preparatory work before the oral delivery, or as an indication of how the written sermon could be expanded, or both. In any case, it shows that Nicolaus Ragvaldi intended to develop further Birgitta's distinction about the three kinds of sloth in his sermon, whereby this distinction becomes part of, and here even defines, the structure (*structura*) of the discourse.

On the Second Sunday after Epiphany, the gospel reading was about the wedding in Cana in Galilee (John 2:1–11). This text is often used as a point of departure for teachings on matrimony, and eminently so in a collection containing sermons mainly in Old Swedish (some of them are infused with quotations in Latin). The manuscript København, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, AM 787 4to, dating from the second half of the 15th century, contains an adaptation of the lost original of this collection, composed at Vadstena probably at the beginning of the century.[50] After reciting the pericope, the preacher presents Birgitta's program for holy matrimony as it appears in Rev. I: 26. First he introduces how Birgitta reproaches those who marry for worldly honor, and then its positive counterpart, those who join in wedlock for the honor of God. Thus, almost half the sermon is made up of Birgitta's teachings on this subject, the sevenfold divisions under each of the two passages becoming nothing less than the structuring device for this part of the sermon. The beginning reads:

> In this holy lesson, it is given us to understand that matrimony is pleasing to God if it is rightly observed. Therefore, Christ said to Birgitta: "People of this age join in wedlock for seven reasons. First, because of facial beauty; second, because of wealth; third, because of the coarse pleasure and indecent joy they get out of coition; fourth, because of festivities and uncontrolled gluttony; fifth, because it gives rise to pride in dressing and eating and entertainment and other vanities; sixth, in order to bring up their offspring not for God or good works but for wealth and honor;

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tua. Nam pro quiete corporis sui amisit tempus suum. Corporis enim sui vtilitas et voluptas erat sibi carissima. Secundo accidiosus erat in cogitacione. Quando enim spiritus tuus bonus immisit cordi eius compunccionem vel aliquam spiritualem intelligenciam, nimis sibi longum videbatur et subtraxit mentem suam a cogitacione spirituali. Et omne gaudium mundi videbatur sibi delectabile et suaue. Tercio erat acccidiosus in ore, id est orando et in loquendo, que vtilitatis aliorum et honoris tui erant. Feruens autem erat ad scurrilia verba.' Hec ibi etc. Ecce quam male aues hec sunt. Applica." For a description of the manuscript see MHUU, vol. 4: 202–3.

50 See Roger Andersson (ed.), *Sermones sacri Svecice. The Sermon Collection in Cod. AM 787 4°* (SFSS, Svenska skrifter 86) (Uppsala: 2006); on dating and provenance see especially 11–20 and 26–38.

> seventh, they join in wedlock on account of lust and the lustful appetite of beasts. They have lust rather than my love in their hearts. Accordingly, such people join in wedlock without the bond and union of God the Father and without the Son's love and without the Holy Spirit's consolation. When the couple comes to bed, my Spirit leaves them at once and the spirit of impurity approaches, because they only come together out of lust. Such a couple will never get to see my face, unless they repent. For there is no sin so grave that penitence does not wash it away." [Rev. 1: 26.18, 20, 22][51]

In this chapter it has been demonstrated that the *Revelations* were quoted extensively by the Vadstena priests in their sermons. The multi-faceted rhetorical functions the quotations display (*auctoritas*, *exemplum*, *structura*) testify to the dynamics of this literary use and reuse. The *Revelations* were not only a collection of visions solemnly read at table in the refectory or copied in silence in the scriptorium. They were also actively, and on an everyday basis, used as a thesaurus by the preachers who were eager to convey Birgitta's message to the listening crowds. One gets the impression that the brothers and most certainly also the sisters must have more or less constantly lived with and thought about the *Revelations*, and this to an extent of which we may not previously have been fully aware. But this is not all. The brothers also scrutinized the *Revelations* to find theological support and justification for what they preached. And it is precisely the observation of the authority of the *Revelations* in the context of the sermons, in which Birgitta's text was used practically on a par with Scripture, which presents itself as one of the more important results. This also fits

51 "J thesso helgho læst giffs oss vndirsta at hionalagh ær gudi tækt om thet rætlica halz Ty sagde christus beate birgitte 'The mæniskior som aff gudlikom kærlek ok gudlikom ræddogha saman føghis j hionalagh til att affla barn til gudz tiænist æru mit andelica mønster / j hulko iak vil tridhi byggia Æn tesse thimans mænniskior saman føghias j hionalagh for siw ting / fførst for ænlitis fægring Annan tidh fore rikedoma tridhia tidh for skørlikhet ok ohøfflika glædhi hulka the hafwa j sinom skøralosta fiærda tidh for thy at thær ær wina samquemdh ok owirmatto swalg ok drykker ffæmta tidh for ty at thær ær høgfærdh j clædhom ok j kost / ok j leek och j andro fafengo Siættatidh for barn sculd / ey for ty at the skuli vpfødhas til gudz hedhir ælla j godhom gærningom vtan til rikedoma Ok verlz hedhir Siundatidh saman koma the for skørlifnadz sculd j hulkins lusta the æru som oskælik diwr / ok skør luste ær j thera hiertom ok ey min ælskoghe ffor ty saman føghias the vtan gudz fadhirs bandh ok hans samhælle / vtan gudz sons kærlek / ok vtan hans helga anda hugnadh Ok naar the koma til sæng / gaar genstan min ande fran them / Och oren diæfwls ande nalkas them Thy at the ey saman komo vtan for skørs lusta sak Tolkin hionalagh sculu alre see mit ænlite vtan the bætræ sik / Ty at engen ær swa tung synd at hon ey aff skrapas mædh idrogha ok bætring.'" Quoted from Andersson, *Sermones sacri*, 131–32.

in astonishingly well with the fact that many preachers present St Birgitta in her role as prophet.

I hope I have been able to demonstrate the potential of the sermon material from Vadstena Abbey to give us a better idea of the medieval understanding of Birgitta, and in particular how her legacy was used and what images were transmitted at the intersection between monastic life and the realities of lay life that was the pulpit at Vadstena.

CHAPTER 7

The Iconography of *Liber celestis revelacionum*

Maria H. Oen

From the time of the first compilation of Birgitta of Sweden's *Liber celestis revelacionum* ("The Heavenly Book of Revelations," hereafter *Revelations*), images have played a significant role in the transmission of the work. More than 150 known Latin manuscripts containing the text have survived, and it was translated into several vernaculars shortly after it was first circulated publicly.[1] While the majority of the preserved codices are not illuminated, the three oldest extant manuscripts include an iconographical program developed specifically for the *Revelations*. These manuscripts, which were made in the same Neapolitan scriptorium in the second half of the 1370s, were produced within a few years after Birgitta's editor and collaborator Alfonso of Jaén completed his redaction of the work.[2] The *Revelations* were first submitted to the canonization committee appointed to evaluate Birgitta's case, and almost immediately thereafter they were distributed in illuminated deluxe codices among prominent secular and ecclesiastical recipients in Italy and beyond.[3] As the *Revelations* were dispersed in the following century, the visual program came to be disseminated with it, and soon new variants of the original iconography developed. The importance of images for the transmission of the *Revelations* is confirmed by the earliest printed versions. Bartholomeus Ghotan's first edition, from 1492 (Lübeck), contains an elaborate cycle of woodcuts, whose iconography forms the basis of those found in Anton Koberger's second edition, from 1500 (Nuremberg). Thus, the new print medium not only fixed the letter

1 On the vernacular translations of the Birgittine texts, see Veronica O'Mara and Bridget Morris (eds.), *The Translation of the Works of St Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars* (Turnhout: 2000). I would like to thank Lena Liepe for her invaluable reading of the chapter, and Jean-Claude Schmitt, who first gave me idea of undertaking a serial iconographic study of Birgitta.

2 On the history of the text and Alfonso's role, see Chapter 1 of the present volume.

3 This is confirmed in a letter by Magnus Petri, a faithful follower of Birgitta's. The emperor, the University of Prague, and the queens of Castile, Cyprus, and Sicily are listed among the recipients. The letter, dated to *c.* 1384–91, is found in Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, "Une source du prologue (Chap. 1) aux Révélations de Sainte Brigitte par le cardinal Jean de Turrecremata," *Eranos* 58 (1960): 214–26.

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of the *Revelations*, thereby making the copies of the text homogenous, but it also fixed a visual program to it.

When Alfonso initially produced his compilation of Birgitta's revelations, the text was meant to serve as evidence of her sanctity. This provides us with the rhetorical occasion for his redaction and for the images integrated into the corpus. The *Revelations*, as well as Birgitta's *Vita*, presents the visionary as a divinely appointed apostle and prophet, and thus her writings are understood to be of "heavenly" origin, thereby boldly implying that they deserved the same status as Scripture. Significantly, the *Revelations* also includes a call for spiritual and political reform.[4] This agenda drew validation from recognition of the author's saintly authority; at the same time, her elevation to sainthood depended on the legitimacy of the *Revelations*. As will be demonstrated below, the iconography of the illuminations in the cycle found in the oldest extant manuscripts deals directly with these issues. The original visual program of the *Revelations* appears to have been designed to structure and direct the experience of the text and the reader's construal of its meaning. S/he is to be persuaded by the message and the illuminations to accept the claims set forth in the work, both with respect to Birgitta's authorial function and the reform program presented.

In this chapter I will focus on the illuminations found in the codices through which the *Revelations* were disseminated, investigating what those images can tell us about how, and with what means, those behind the work sought to influence its reception. I will analyse the rhetorical strategies employed in the visual program found in a selection of manuscripts to examine the concept of Birgitta's authorial role (and the status of the text) the books conveyed to their readers. This study of a group of manuscripts produced in different contexts also allows an exploration into how this concept developed over time and in the different milieus in which the work was read. My method is based on Jérôme Baschet's notion of "serial iconography."[5] Through an analysis of what remains constant and what changes within a series, it is possible to highlight transformations in form and function, and thus in the production of meaning. An iconographical series can be constructed either by the artworks themselves in the sense that they already exist within a program, e.g. a frieze on a church wall or a set of illuminations in a manuscript, or by the researcher on

4 See Unn Falkeid, *The Avignon Papacy Contested: An Intellectual History from Dante to Catherine of Siena* (Cambridge, Mass.: 2017), 121–45. See also Falkeid's chapter in the present volume.

5 Jérôme Baschet, "Pourquoi élaborer des bases de données d'image? Propositions pour une iconographie sérielle," in *History and Images: Towards a New Iconology*, eds. Axel Bolvig and Philip Lindley (Turnhout: 2003).

the basis of, for instance, the selection of themes or motifs found in a series of independent artworks that are then juxtaposed. In my investigation of the Birgittine iconographical program I will begin by exploring one series belonging to the former type: the cycle of illuminations found in the three oldest preserved codices containing the *Revelations*. I will then proceed with a second series comprising illuminations in a selection of manuscripts produced in different social and linguistic contexts in Europe during the first century after the initial publication of the work. This exploration into the iconography of the *Revelations* is far from exhaustive; instead, it is to be understood as an introduction to the field.

1 The First *Revelations*

The oldest extant books containing the *Revelations* are three illustrated codices that have been dated to the period between *c.* 1377 and 1381.[6] Today, these are known as MS 3310 of Biblioteka Narodowa in Warsaw; MS IV.G.2 of Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana, Palermo; and MS M.498 of the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.[7] As a group they display a unified pictorial program

6 The dating is based on Hans Aili and Jan Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae: The Earliest Illuminated Manuscripts and Panel Paintings Related to the Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, 2 vols (Stockholm: 2003).

7 For the Warsaw MS, see Alexandre de Laborde, "Les principaux manuscrits à peintures conservés dans l'ancienne Bibliothèque Impériale publique de St. Petersbourg," *Bulletin de la Société française de reproductions de manuscrits à peintures* 18 (1937): 41–42; Stanislawa Sawicka, "Les principaux manuscrits à peintures de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Varsovie," *Bulletin de la Société française de reproductions de manuscrits à peintures* 19 (1938): 86–96; Andrzej Klossowski, *The National Library in Warsaw: Collections and Programmes* (Warsaw: 1991), 19ff; Mereth Lindgren, "Ett återupptäckt Birgittamanuskript," *Ikonographisk Post* 4 (1993): 1–14; Jan Svanberg and Hans Aili, "Två tidiga Birgittahandskrifter. En återfunnen och en brunnen," *Iconographisk Post* 1 (1994): 28–40. On the Palermo MS, see Henrik Schück, "Några anmärkningar om Birgittas Revelationer," KVHAA, handlingar 13: 1 (Stockholm: 1901), 54; Angela Daneu Lattanzi, *Il "Liber celestis Revelationum" di Santa Brigida in un codice campano della seconda metà del sec. XIV* (Palermo: 1955); Mario Salmi, *Italian Miniatures* (London: 1957); Silvia Masone Barecca (ed.), *Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana* (Florence: 1992), 68–69. On the New York codex, see Paolo d'Ancona, "Il liber celestium revelationum sanctae Brigidae illustrato da un miniatore senese della prima metà del sec. xv," *Bibliofilia* 14 (1912): 1–5; Knut B. Westman, "Två handskrifter av Birgittas Revelationer," *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 14 (1913): 21–23; Belle da Costa Greene and Meta P. Harrsen, *The Pierpont Morgan Library: Exhibition of Illuminated Manuscripts held at the New York Public Library* (New York: 1934), 45; Meta Harrsen and George K. Boyce, *Italian Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (New York: 1953), 25–26. According to colophons on fols 301v and 414r, the New York MS was kept by Alfonso, who brought it with him to Genoa, where he spent his last years in

consisting of three full-page illuminations and thirteen historiated initials, all of which have a fixed placement in relation to the text. The program, which was first identified by Carl Nordenfalk in an article from 1961, has been the subject of several studies of late.[8]

Based on codicological analysis of the structure of the quires and the iconographical and stylistic evidence of the illuminations, there is a general agreement among scholars that the three codices stem from the same Neapolitan workshop as a number of sumptuous manuscripts produced for the Angevin royal family, such as the so-called Vienna Bible (Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 1191) and the Oxford Psalter (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Liturg. 151).[9] The city of Naples, a significant artistic center in the Trecento, as

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the monastery San Girolamo di Quarto, of the Hieronymite Order founded together with his brother; see Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*: vol. 1: 31–32.

8 Carl Nordenfalk, "Saint Bridget of Sweden as Represented in Illuminated Manuscripts," in *De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss (New York: 1961). The most comprehensive contributions are Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*, and Anette Creutzburg, *Die heilige Birgitta von Schweden. Bildliche Darstellungen und theologische Kontroversen im Vorfeld ihrer Kanonisation (1373–1391)* (Kiel: 2011). See also Désirée Koslin, "Under the Influence: Copying the *Revelaciones* of St. Birgitta of Sweden," in *Tributes to Jonathan J.G. Alexander: The Making and Meaning of Illuminated Medieval & Renaissance Manuscripts, Art & Architecture*, eds. Gerald B. Guest and Susan L'Engle (London: 2006); Joan Isobel Friedman, "Politics and the Rhetoric of Reform in the Letters of Saints Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena," in *Livres et lectures de femmes en Europa entre Moyen Âge et Renaissance*, ed. Anne-Marie Legaré (Turnhout: 2007); Anette Creutzburg, "Darstellungen von göttlicher Inspiration in der Neapeler Buchmalerei. Zur Visualisierung von *auctoritas* in der Autorenbildern der hl. Birgitta von Schweden," in *Buchschätze des Mittelalters. Forschungsrückblicke—Forschungsperspektiven. Beiträge zum Kolloquium des Kunsthistorischen Instituts der Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel vom 24. bis zum 26. April 2009*, eds. Klaus Gereon Beuckers, Christoph Jobst, and Stefanie Westphal (Regensburg: 2011); Maria H. Oen, "The Visions of St. Birgitta: A Study of the Making and Reception of Images in the Later Middle Ages" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oslo, 2015); F. Thomas Luongo, "Inspiration and Imagination: Visionary Authorship in the Early Manuscripts of the *Revelations* of Birgitta of Sweden," *Speculum* 93 (2018): 1102–50.

9 Nordenfalk was the first to suggest that they were produced by the same artist. This artist was later dubbed "Il Maestro del *Liber celestium revelationum*" by Ferdinando Bologna in *I pittori alla corte angioina di Napoli, 1266–1414* (Rome: 1969), 329. For further studies on the artist and the scriptorium, see Antonella Putaturo Murano, "Il Maestro del Seneca dei Girolamini di Napoli," in *Studi di storia dell'arte in memoria di Mario Rotili* (Benevento: 1984); Anna De Floriani, "Un'aggiunta al 'Maestro del *Liber Celestium Revelationum*'," *Studi di Storia dell'Arte* 3 (1992): 219–35; Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*: vol. 1: 47–55; Andreas Bräm, *Neapolitanische Bilderbibeln des Trecento. Anjou-Buchmalerei von Robert dem Weisen bis zu Johanna I* (Wiesbaden: 2007), vol. 1: 154–68. Antonella Putaturo Murano, "La bottega del maestro del *Liber Celestium Revelationum*," in *Santa Brigida, Napoli, l'Italia. Atti del Convegno di studi italo-svedese Santa Maria Capua Vetere, 10–11 maggio 2006*, eds. Olle Ferm, Alessandra Perriccioli Saggese, and Marcello Rotili (Naples: 2009); Creutzburg, *Die heilige Birgitta von*

well as the Angevin queen Johanna I played an important role in the campaign for Birgitta's canonization.[10] The visionary had herself spent extended periods in the city, where she had befriended Johanna, who later signed petitions to the pope in support of Birgitta's sanctity.[11] The first extant devotional images of the saint *in spe*—three small panel paintings depicting Birgitta receiving a vision of the birth of Christ while visiting the Nativity cave in Bethlehem (described in Rev. VII: 21)—were also painted in Naples, *c.* 1373–75, by the Tuscan artist Niccolò di Tommaso, then in the service of Queen Johanna.[12] Scholars who have studied the earliest extant pictorial representations of Birgitta agree that these were all produced in Naples as part of a strategy to promote the visionary's cult and her writings. Anette Creutzburg, who has examined the Neapolitan cycle of illuminations in relation to *Epistola solitarii ad reges* ("The Hermits' Letter to Kings")—the apologetic text composed by Alfonso of Jaén to demonstrate the authenticity of Birgitta's visions and included as a prologue to the last book in his redaction of the *Revelations*—has shown that there are striking similarities between Alfonso's rhetorical strategies and the iconography of the illuminations.[13] Whether or not Alfonso was personally responsible for the conception of the program of illuminations in addition to

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Schweden, 101–7. On illuminated MSS and the House of Anjou, see Bräm, *Neapolitanische Bilderbibeln*; and several chapters in Lieve Watteeuw and Jan Van der Stock (eds.), *The Anjou Bible: A Royal Manuscript Revealed. Naples 1340* (Paris: 2010).

10 See Bologna, *I pittori alla corte angioina*; Pierluigi Leone De Castris, *Arte di corte nella Napoli angioina* (Florence: 1986).

11 On the relationship between Birgitta and the queen, see Bridget Morris, "Birgitta of Sweden and Giovanna of Naples: An Unlikely Friendship?" in Ferm, Perriccioli Saggese, and Rotili *Santa Brigida, Napoli, L'Italia*, 23–33; Elizabeth Casteen, *From She-Wolf to Martyr: The Reign and Disputed Reputation of Johanna I of Naples* (Ithaca, N.Y.: 2015), especially Ch. 4. See also Claudia Vultaggio, "I sodalizi Napolitani di Santa Brigida di Svezia," in Ferm, Perriccioli Saggese, and Rotili, *Santa Brigida, Napoli, L'Italia*, 105–29.

12 For discussions of the paintings, now in the Pinacoteca Vaticana, Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Yale University Art Gallery, see Richard Offner, *Studies in Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century* (New York: 1927), 114–16; Jan Svanberg, "De allra äldsta bilderna av den heliga Birgitta och hennes vision av Jesu födelse," *Kungl. Vitterhets, historie och antikvitets akademiens årsbok* (Stockholm: 1997); Erling Skaug, "St. Bridget's Vision of the Nativity and Niccolò de Tommaso's Late Period," *Arte Cristiana* 89, no. 804 (2001): 195–209; Erling Skaug, "Niccolò di Tommaso of Florence, St. Bridget of Sweden's First Painter," *Acta ad archaeologiam et artivm historiam pertinentia* 18 (2004): 289–321. On the connection between the iconography and Birgitta's vision of the Nativity, and the impact of this text on art, see Henrik Cornell, "The Iconography of the Nativity," *Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift* (1924): 1–101; Maria H. Oen, "Iconography and Visions: St. Birgitta's Revelation of the Nativity of Christ," in *The Locus of Meaning in Medieval Art: Iconography, Iconology, and Interpreting the Visual Imagery of the Middle Ages*, ed. Lena Liepe (Berlin: 2019).

13 Creutzburg, *Die heilige Birgitta von Schweden*, esp. Ch. 4.

compiling the literary work itself, it is clear from the surviving sources that Birgitta's supporters strategically employed imagery to advance her cult and to legitimize their shared spiritual and political aims, with Naples serving as the center of this enterprise in the first years after the visionary's death.[14]

In their present condition, none of the three manuscripts contains the complete program of images as it was first identified by Nordenfalk. The lack of uniformity can be explained by lacunae in all three copies exactly where certain images would have been placed, as well as the slight difference in the books of revelations included in each copy. For instance, the Warsaw manuscript contains a shorter version of the corpus, presumed by some modern critical editors to be Alfonso's first redaction.[15] According to Hans Aili and Jan Svanberg's reconstruction of the original pictorial program produced by the workshop, the complete version consisted of three full-page illuminations placed as frontispieces to the entire work; to the fifth book, the *Liber questionum* ("The Book of Questions"); and to the eighth book, the *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges* ("The Heavenly Emperor's Book to Kings"), respectively. Furthermore, it comprised thirteen historiated initials at the opening of the individual books, including the prologue to the corpus, written by Master Mathias of Linköping, and Alfonso's *Epistola*, as well as other texts that over time became a part of the corpus, such as the *Sermo angelicus* ("The Angel's Discourse") and Birgitta's rule for a new monastic order, the *Regula Salvatoris* ("The Rule of the Savior"). Notwithstanding the discrepancies between the manuscripts, the hypothesis that a coherent program of images was intended as a part of the *Revelations* is confirmed by later copies that contain the complete corpus accompanied by the full cycle of illuminations.[16]

The Neapolitan visual program displays a highly original and complex iconography. The miniatures offer excellent examples of the inventive and playful traditionalism that characterizes medieval culture. As Baschet explains it,

14 This observation is supported by a letter written by Alfonso and Birgitta's daughter Katarina Ulfsdotter to the archbishop in Uppsala, Sweden, on 15 January 1378 (see SDHK 11166 in the database of the National Archives in Sweden, https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sdhk). The letter informs the archbishop about the dissemination of the *Revelations*, which had by then spread in Spain and Italy; and, as Alfonso states, more copies were "continuously being produced in the Kingdom of Naples and in Italy." Katarina adds that images of her mother had also spread in Naples and Rome. According to Ferdinando Bologna, it was Johanna who commissioned the New York codex, though he does not provide any evidence to substantiate this claim; see Bologna, *I pittori alla corte angioina*, 329–30.

15 On Alfonso's redaction, see the Introduction to the present volume.

16 Examples of these are Torino, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, I.III.23 (early 15th century); Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. Preußischer Kulturbesitz, theol. lat. fol. 33 (mid-15th century) and Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, A 70 b (first half of the 15th century).

the prestige of a work of art (or literature) in the Middle Ages was dependent on the work's "reverence" for an esteemed prototype. Established and revered models were incorporated into a new work in a manner that Baschet is careful to describe as *active citation*, best understood in terms of intertextuality, as opposed to a passive employment of a model (often described in vague terms as "inspiration" in traditional art history).[17] Such citations of authoritative prototypes could aid in enhancing the efficaciousness of an image or a text, politically, ideologically, and/or aesthetically. Citing revered models of classical Christian iconography is a strategy arguably employed quite carefully in the oldest Birgittine manuscripts, where they serve to bolster the authority of the text they embellish and to shape the reader's perception of Birgitta's role in the production and publication of the work as well as the ontological and epistemological status of the phenomena described by the letters in the books.

2 Birgitta's Author Portrait

The first miniature, the frontispiece to the complete corpus, and currently preserved only in the New York copy on fol. 4v (Fig. 7.1), is an author portrait of Birgitta shown in the act of receiving and recording a revelation. The content of the vision is displayed in the lower left corner of the folio—a Eucharist miracle occurring at the moment when the priest elevates the host—while, in the opposite lower corner, Birgitta is presented next to her writing desk, where she has a pen in her right hand and a codex in her lap. The two scenes have different backgrounds, indicating that they do not take place in the same time and space. Nevertheless, they are connected by means of the half-length figure of an angel appearing from a cloud between the two scenes. With arms outstretched, the angel gestures in both directions while looking at the visionary. Set against a blue background, the larger upper section of the folio offers a heavenly hierarchy consisting of horizontal levels composed of rows of saints, apostles, and angels, respectively. At the very top and center is a mandorla in which Christ and the Virgin are seated on a globe, surrounded by red seraphs. Diagonal lines extend between the visionary and the heavenly couple, whose hands send forth rays that culminate at Birgitta's head. Her head is surrounded by golden rays identical to those around the heavenly couple, thus visually enforcing the connection between them.

The frontispiece seeks to persuade the reader and viewer, in accordance with the text on the following pages, that Birgitta is not the architect of the

17 See Baschet, "Pourquoi élaborer des bases de données d'image?," 66 and 83.



FIGURE 7.1 *St Birgitta of Sweden Receiving a Vision* (*Frontispiece to the Heavenly Book of Revelations*). New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.498, fol. 4v. Date: Last quarter of 14th century.
PHOTO: THE PIERPONT MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM. MS M.498, FOL. 4V. PURCHASED BY J. PIERPONT MORGAN (1837–1913) IN 1912

Revelations, but that the work contains divine truth imparted to her by the agency of Christ and the Virgin, and that the nature of Birgitta's perception of this truth is spiritual or intellectual, as opposed to corporeal. This latter point is realized visually by means of the beams joining Birgitta with Christ and the Virgin, thus reflecting the influx of divine *lux supernaturalis* ("supernatural light")—that which, according to Alfonso's *Epistola*, generated the visions.[18]

Scholars have sought to identify the correct chapter from the *Revelations* illustrated in the scene with the priest. Suggestions include Rev. VI: 86 and VIII: 56, both of which address miraculous transformations of the host.[19] The Eucharist miracle in the image may very well be intended to evoke one, or even both, of these specific texts. However, in the present context, where the scene is a part of a frontispiece that functions as a sort of reader's guide, it is more plausible that its significance is to serve—as Eucharistic miracle stories often did—as a proof to doubters. The depicted elevation of the host is thus a representative example offered to the reader of Birgitta's revelations of those phenomena recorded in the book, and, importantly, of their truth value. The Eucharist is a subject that appears frequently in the *Revelations*, not only as a part of a transformation miracle, but also in discussions of sinful priests and the potential risk of contamination of the host such transgressors could pose.[20] By exemplifying Birgitta's visions with this particular motif, the frontispiece substantiates the orthodoxy of the *Revelations*: Birgitta is, as is rendered visible by the image, not a doubter, nor should anyone disbelieve that her visions are in compliance with doctrine.

The placement of the figure of Birgitta in the act of receiving a divine vision parallel to the scene of the Eucharistic miracle further invites the viewer/reader of the manuscript to see these phenomena as being somehow equal. Through the reception of visions Birgitta is making the Word of God physically present in the world again, just as the *Logos* is truly present as the blood and flesh of Christ in the transubstantiated host. This function of Birgitta's is stated explicitly in Rev. VI: 88, where the Virgin compares the visionary's mission with her own role as the Mother of God, giving flesh to the *Logos*, and thus making God present in the word.

In the portrayal of Birgitta on the frontispiece there is one striking detail that may not stand out to the modern beholder, but which to the first medieval

18 For a comparison of the illuminations with Alfonso's *Epistola*, see Creutzburg, *Die heilige Birgitta von Schweden*.

19 For example, Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*, vol. 1: 63–64; Creutzburg, *Die heilige Birgitta von Schweden*, 123.

20 For example, Rev. IV: 61, 63 (On Real Presence), Rev. VI: 29 (On Birgitta receiving the Eucharist), 79 (on false priests administering the Eucharist).

viewers would have been quite remarkable: the depiction of Birgitta in the act of writing. In her study of visual representations of women writing in medieval manuscripts, Lesley Smith has brought attention to the notable paucity of images of female scribes in this period.[21] The ancient tradition of inserting a portrait of an author presiding over his text in papyrus rolls, and later in codices, had continued to be practiced throughout the Middle Ages.[22] In these author portraits, which could take the form of a historiated initial or a larger miniature serving as a frontispiece, as in the case of the New York codex, the author was typically rendered holding his book, or, more often, as a scribe with pen in hand. Within monasteries, and later in secular workshops, women had also acted as scribes, copying and illuminating manuscripts, and, especially from the 12th century onwards, numerous literary works were authored by women. Yet, as Smith notes, there are hardly any author portraits, and extremely few scribal portraits, or images of any other visual genre of a woman with a pen in hand in manuscripts before 1400.[23]

There is no clear explanation as to why female authors in general do not appear as scribes in medieval manuscripts, but it is tempting to see the conspicuous lack of such representations in direct relation to the prohibition on women's public speech. According to a proscription rooted in the Pauline letters (1 Cor. 14:34–35, 1 Tim. 2:12) and codified in *Decretum Gratiani*, women were not allowed to preach in public or in the church, nor were they permitted to instruct men in any manner outside of the private realm.[24] Whereas before the 13th century most religious works composed by women circulated predominantly within the closed realm of the monasteries, from the 1200s on, texts composed by women, lay and religious, came to be disseminated among

21 Lesley Smith, "*Scriba, Femina*: Medieval Depictions of Women Writing," in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, eds. Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor (London: 1996). See also Katrin Graf, *Bildnisse schreibender Frauen im Mittelalter, 9. bis Anfang 13. Jahrhundert* (Basel: 2002). Smith's focus is on manuscript illuminations prior to *c.* 1400. After this, she notes, there are more images of women writing, especially in secular and vernacular contexts.

22 For medieval author portraits, see *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 1, cols 232–234. See also Laura Kendrick, *Animating the Letter: The Figurative Embodiment of Writing from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Columbus, Ohio: 1999), Ch. 6; Eric Palazzo, "Le portrait d'auteur dans les manuscrits du Moyen Âge," in *Portraits d'écrivains. La représentation de l'auteur dans les manuscrits et les imprimés du Moyen Âge et de la première Renaissance* (Paris: 2002).

23 Smith excludes female personifications and mythological figures from her survey.

24 See Emil Friedberg (ed.), *Corpus Juris Canonici* (Leipzig 1879–81, repr. Graz: 1955), vol. 1, col. 86. See also Alastair Minnis, "Religious Roles: Public and Private," in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100–c. 1500*, eds. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout: 2010).

a much larger audience. Such a wide diffusion, which allows us to refer to their works as "published," may have been perceived to be touching dangerously close to the ban against female public speech/instruction.[25] This could be why there are so few author portraits of women holding a pen. Despite the fact that the composition usually took the form of dictation to a scribe regardless of the composer's gender, an author portrait of a woman with the pen in her own hand would visually manifest her agency as *speaker* or *instructor* in a publicly available work containing her own teachings. As Dyan Elliott and F. Thomas Luongo have demonstrated, it seems that displaying an explicit aversion to having a public voice, or even to writing, was an important strategy, and indeed paramount, for women who sought to successfully convey a message to a larger audience or assume the public role of an author.[26]

In her study, Smith could identify only two female authors who are represented in accordance with the visual scheme of a standard medieval male author portrait: Birgitta of Sweden and her predecessor Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179).[27] While there is no extant evidence in the Birgittine sources to substantiate the hypothesis that the older visionary—well known in Birgitta's time—was a model for the younger, or that her portrait inspired the Neapolitan artist, the depictions of the two women as scribes do, however, clearly have the same original visual model, the evangelist portrait. As first demonstrated

25 In his reference to the apostolic injunction, the famous theologian Jean Gerson explicitly speaks of the biblical prohibition of women's teaching in speech *and* writing; see Jean Gerson, "De examinatione doctrinarum," in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. P. Glorieux (Paris: Desclée & Cie, 1960–73), in vol. 9: 467–68: "…the female sex is by apostolic authority forbidden to teach in public; that is, teaching, *either in words or in writing*, which is published in her name, even more so if it is directed at men, and not just any men, but those who are wise, learned or of an eminent standing in devotion and religion" ("…sexus muliebris ab apostolica prohibetur auctoritate ne palam doceat; doctrinam intellige, *seu verbo seu scripto*, nomine suo publicatam, maxime si fuerit ad viros, nec qualescumque, sed sapientes, sed eruditos, sed status in devotione et religione praecellentis."). Italics added.

26 Dyan Elliott, "*Dominae* or *Dominatae?* Female Mysticism and the Trauma of Textuality," in *Women, Marriage, and Family in Medieval Christendom: Essays in Memory of Michael M. Sheehan, C.S.B.*, eds. Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal (Kalamazoo: 1998); F. Thomas Luongo, "Saintly Authorship in the Italian Renaissance: The Quattrocento Reception of Catherine of Siena's Letters," in *Catherine of Siena: The Creation of a Cult*, eds. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Gabriela Signori (Turnhout: 2013).

27 Two manuscripts from the late 12th and the early 13th centuries, which contain Hildegard's *Scivias* (Wiesbaden, Hessische Landesbibliothek, 1, only preserved in facsimile) and *Liber divinorum operum* (Lucca, Biblioteca statale, 1942), respectively, show the author in the act of recording a text on a wax tablet while she is receiving a vision. On Hildegard's author portrait, see Katrin Graf, "Les portraits d'auteur de Hildegarde de Bingen," *Scriptorium* 55, no. 2 (2001): 179–96.

by Sara Ekwall, and supported by more recent studies by Creutzburg, the illustration of the writing Birgitta, just as that of Hildegard, follows this iconographical type that had appeared already in the 6th century.[28] These author portraits, which take the form of miniatures introducing the respective gospels, typically portray the evangelist in full length, seated and in the act of writing, his gaze turned up toward a symbol of divine inspiration, usually in the form of the hand or bust of God, an evangelist symbol, or the dove of the Holy Spirit. The representation of the writing Birgitta on the New York frontispiece is completely in accordance with this model, though here with the inclusion of an abundance of unimpeachable witnesses who can verify the supernatural origin and mode of composition of the work at hand. The evangelist portrait traditionally served as a means of attesting that the actual author of the work was God and not the portrayed scribe, who, despite not representing the genesis of the words, has a divinely appointed role as God's instrument. Moreover, the portrait type encouraged the viewer and reader to elide the codex denoted in the illumination with the manuscript in which the scene is painted. As a result, the physical book holding the illumination could continuously actualize the mystical "production" of the Word of God and the validity of this origin myth. By harnessing the suggestive power of this particular visual model, the portrait of Birgitta—cast as an evangelist—could thus confer authority on the *Revelations*, and sanctity on its author. Furthermore, the employment of the evangelist iconography together with the rays of light, emphasizing the heavenly origin of the contents of her writings, functions to underline Birgitta's role as a divinely appointed prophetess, a role that constituted the only exception to the prohibition of women instructing men in public acknowledged by theologians of the time.[29]

28 Sara Ekwall, "Ett ikonografiskt Birgittaproblem: Har förebilden till den skrivande Birgitta i Vadstena varit den skrivande evangelisten?" *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 37, no. 1 (1968): 1–20; Creutzburg, "Darstellungen von göttlicher Inspiration"; Creutzburg, *Die heilige Birgitta von Schweden*, esp. 176–225. On evangelist portraits, see *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie,* vol. 1, cols 699–706; A.M. Friend, "The Portraits of the Evangelists in Greek and Latin Manuscripts. Part 1," *Art Studies* 5 (1927): 115–47; A.M. Friend, "The Portraits of the Evangelists in Greek and Latin Manuscripts. Part 2," *Art Studies* 7 (1929): 3–29; Carl Nordenfalk, "Der Inspirierte Evangelist," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 36 (1983): 175–90.

29 Henry of Ghent (d. 1293) acknowledged that women could indeed be chosen as prophets, as demonstrated by the female prophets in the Old Testament, and that this would, to some extent, authorize them to communicate their prophecies. However, he also underlines that this was an exceptional situation that happened only when men, those who were supposed to have this role, were effeminate and did not prove worthy of their positions. In other words, if God wanted to make a point, he would choose a conduit who was,

3 The Privileged Vision

Another strategy for promoting and sanctioning women's public voices in the later Middle Ages was to present the source of their authority in terms understood to be in direct contrast to those domains from which they were excluded. In his exploration of Catherine of Siena as author, Luongo has established that her followers attempted to legitimize her writings by stressing her supernatural inspiration and "immediate experience of divine things," which are understood as the opposite of the "theological abstraction associated with 'masculine' intellectuality" and the institutions of knowledge from which women were excluded.[30] A visual expression of this strategy can be found in the second full-page illumination in the Neapolitan cycle, serving as a frontispiece to the fifth book in the corpus and preserved only in the Warsaw copy on fol. 224v (Fig. 7.2). Here, Birgitta's immediate access to sacred knowledge is privileged over that of scholastic theology. This miniature, like the author portrait, is divided horizontally into a terrestrial sphere and a celestial one; and Christ and the Virgin seated inside a mandorla surrounded by red seraphs are again placed centrally in the upper section. A ladder that forms a diagonal line between the lower left corner of the folio and the mandorla connects the heavenly and earthly realms in a fashion similar to that of the rays of light in the author portrait miniature. Positioned nearly at the top of the ladder is a male figure dressed in the Dominican habit. He gestures beseechingly with his left hand towards Christ, who, in turn, points toward his side wound with the one hand and toward the friar with the other. Scrolls meant to represent speech issue forth from their mouths. The Virgin does not partake in the conversation but instead looks down at Birgitta, mounted on a horse at the bottom of the page, and she emits rays of light rendered as a white line flanked by golden stripes that terminate in the visionary's eyes. The rays of light should not be confused with the two scrolls to the left of the mandorla, which, in contrast to the band representing spiritual light, are partly furled at the two ends where they meet.[31] Birgitta, who is followed by other companions on horses, gazes up with hands folded in prayer. Inside and around the castle in the lower left

in reality, and because of her body, not worthy of this function. See Minnis, "Religious Roles," 48–50; and Chapter 2 in the present work.

30 Luongo, "Saintly Authorship," 139.

31 There is a general agreement among scholars who have studied the MS that the representation on fol. 224v, as well as in the historiated initial on fol. 6v in the same MS, is to be understood as a ray of light; see, for instance, Sawicka, "Les principaux manuscrits," 90; Nordenfalk, "Saint Bridget of Sweden," 378; Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*, vol. 1: 67; and Creutzburg, *Die heilige Birgitta von Schweden*, 127–28.



FIGURE 7.2 *St Birgitta of Sweden Receiving a Vision* (*Frontispiece to the Book of Questions*). Warszawa, Biblioteka Narodowa, 3310, fol. 224v. Date: Last quarter of 14th century.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BIBLIOTEKA NARODOWA, WARSAW

corner of the image there are numerous figures who look at her. In this act they parallel the heavenly witnesses in the first frontispiece. Though not able to view what Birgitta sees, they can bear testimony to the fact that something is indeed happening to her, as she is visibly transfixed. In this manner, the miniature echoes the description of Alfonso's *Epistola*, in which it is stated that Birgitta's visions were received while she was in a state of spiritual ecstasy.[32]

The miniature is an illustration of the mise-en-scène of the vision that constitutes the *Liber questionum*. The text explains that while she was riding toward the castle in Vadstena—later the first abbey of the Birgittine Order—Birgitta had experienced an intellectual vision during a spiritual rapture. In it, she saw a ladder placed between heaven and earth on which there was a quarrelsome man, described as a *religiosus*, engaged in a dispute with Christ.[33] As in the author portrait, this miniature also cites a model from Christian iconography, namely, the heavenly ladder. The subject, which has its biblical origin in the dream of Jacob related in Genesis (28:10–19), soon came to serve as a symbol of both the hierarchical organization of the universe but also the gradual spiritual progression of the soul towards God.[34] The heavenly ladder also has a prominent place in medieval iconography, found not only in depictions of Jacob's dream but also in illustrations of spiritual progression, typically that of a monk or a nun. Thus, the miniature immediately evokes an established visual and textual tradition. Yet if we compare the image with the subject of Birgitta's vision it is clear that the meaning of both text and illumination is very different from the traditional significance of the motif. In the revelation, the *religiosus* is not presented favorably, despite his high position on the ladder. The words of the text explicitly state that his attitude and bodily movements revealed him to be "full of malice and deceit" (*dolo et malicia plenus*).

Christian Heck argues that the ladder in Birgitta's vision does not symbolize spiritual progression but scholastic theology, which, in turn, is contrasted with the visionary's direct access to heaven. The composition of the illumination strengthens this interpretation through its clear juxtaposition of the ladder and the spiritual light illuminating Birgitta.[35] The ladder in the vision thus indicates the connection the *religiosus*, here clearly identified as a Dominican friar, constructs between himself and heaven and also demonstrates

32 ES: 4.

33 Rev. v: prol. and 1.1–2.

34 On the development of the motif of the heavenly ladder in art and literature from late antiquity through the Middle Ages, see Christian Heck, *L'échelle céleste dans l'art du Moyen Âge. Une image de la quête du ciel* (Paris: 1997).

35 Heck, *L'échelle céleste*, 125–26.

his capacity (or lack thereof) of elevating himself spiritually towards God. In contrast, Birgitta has a more direct, and, as Heck writes, more authentic connection, symbolized by the rays of light conveyed directly to her by the Virgin. Birgitta's supernatural vision, linked to the act of praying (as recognized by her gestures) and the divinely induced cascade of supernatural light, is thus distinguished from the theologian's type of knowledge, attained through debate and discussion. Through these means, Birgitta's authority is visually established as something different and, significantly, more privileged than that of the Dominican's, who follows the method of scholastic *disputatio*. At the same time, the structure of the text on the pages following the miniature, itself reminiscent of a scholastic debate, indicates that the visionary, whom the first frontispiece has shown to be the instrument, or "human pen," of God, is proficient in the sort of discourse that she, or God, has demonstrated to be futile, in terms of spiritual and epistemological value.

4 Mediation and Approval

The third and last full-page illumination (Fig. 7.3) in the cycle introduces the *Epistola* of Alfonso, followed by the *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges*—a compilation of revelations concerning secular rule and kingship, often described as a Mirror of Kings.[36] In the New York codex, the only one in which it is presently preserved, the miniature is found on fol. 343v. The illumination employs axial structures to create a visual argument concerning the mediation of the work on the following pages and its legitimacy. It is divided horizontally into two distinct registers, both of which offer *traditio* motifs, or presentation scenes; each of these, in turn, is further divided horizontally into two tiers. Christ and the Virgin, depicted as half-length figures, are placed in the center of the uppermost tier, flanked by groups of saints. A kneeling Birgitta is situated on the left side of the tier below, and while the Virgin points toward her with her right hand, Christ extends to her an open book with his right hand. The visionary receives the book with her left hand while she simultaneously presents an identical open book to her two confessors and collaborators, who kneel next to her. Alfonso, here wearing a dark habit, is shown closest to Birgitta, and next to him

36 In his prologue, Alfonso discusses Birgitta's *Revelations* as comprising seven books, and he treats the *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges* as *his* own additional compilation of Birgitta's visions (several of which are repeated from earlier books), which are thematically organized by him and added to the Birgittine corpus. His role is thus presented more explicitly as that of a *compilator* and editor than in the foregoing books—a point that is also visually emphasized in the New York frontispiece.



FIGURE 7.3 *St Birgitta of Sweden Receiving the Heavenly Emperor's Book to Kings from Christ* (*Frontispiece to The Heavenly Emperor's Book to Kings*). New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.498, fol. 343v. Date: Last quarter of 14th century. PHOTO: THE PIERPONT MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM. MS M.498, FOL. 343V. PURCHASED BY J. PIERPONT MORGAN (1837–1913) IN 1912

is one of her two Swedish confessors, Prior Peter, recognized by his Cistercian white habit. Within the same register there is a desk, on which are writing utensils. The desk is separated from the visionary by the confessors, who occupy the place on the central vertical axis directly below Christ and the Virgin, both of whom are pointing down towards the two men with their left hands.

In the upper tier of the lower register, rows of seated kings and queens flank an enthroned king who is situated on the central vertical axis immediately below the two confessors and the heavenly couple in the tiers above. In the bottom tier, below the raised platform of the royals, numerous figures are divided into two distinct parties placed in each corner of the folio. Those to the left are dressed in various items of secular attire, whereas those on the right side are tonsured men in religious habits, including a bishop wearing a gilded miter and cope. The gazes of the standing figures are all turned toward the centrally placed king, who receives an open book, identical to the one illustrated twice above, from the two kneeling confessors, also depicted for the second time. At the very bottom of the central vertical axis are two female figures, who may be interpreted as personifications of the two groups displayed on their respective sides, the laity and the religious. As the end point of the central axis—which runs from Christ and the Virgin, representing the divine genesis of the book, through the ecclesiastical intermediaries, Alfonso and Peter, to the earthly emperor receiving the book—the two figures thus stand for the Church and the whole world and all its social classes for whose benefit the *Revelations* have been mediated from God to the earthly emperor, through the visionary Birgitta.[37]

In addition to illustrating the title of the work, "The Heavenly Emperor's Book to Kings," the iconography of this miniature subtly addresses the role Birgitta played in its publication. As discussed above, a potential obstacle for the wide dissemination of the *Revelations* was the injunction against women's public instruction. During the time that Birgitta presented herself as a visionary, there were similar claims by other laypeople, many of them also women; and many of these people called for spiritual and ecclesiastical reform, as the Swedish visionary later did. Such voices of dissent posed a threat to the established hierarchy in society and in the Church, where men were above women, and the clergy above the laity. As exemplified by later treatises attacking women's teaching, much of the criticism directed against visionary women was connected to the perceived threat to this hierarchy.[38] In her *Vita* and in

37 This point is made explicit in Birgitta's *Vita*, see AP, 86.

38 See Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: 2003); and Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writings of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbridge: 1999).

Alfonso's *Epistola*, Birgitta's supporters were therefore careful to constantly emphasize the saint's humbleness and her submissive role toward her confessors. Indeed, Alfonso claims that the very first sign by which a true visionary, speaking with the voice of God, can be recognized is her humility and her obedience toward her spiritual fathers—and Birgitta is presented as the paragon of such virtues.[39] Alfonso also notes that the recording of her revelations was done on Christ's command, referring not only to Birgitta's role but also to the contributions of Prior Peter, who was charged with translating the text into Latin, and Alfonso, the divinely appointed compiler of the revelations. The pivotal role of Birgitta's two collaborators in the publication of the work, and the visionary's obedience to them, is also rendered visible in the miniature, where we see Birgitta simultaneously receiving the *Revelations* from Christ and offering them to the men, thus demonstrating that she keeps nothing hidden from her confessors and does not presume to interpret or take control of the divine message alone without guidance from her spiritual fathers. Significantly, Birgitta is also separated from the writing desk, symbolizing the production of the written work, which is to be made public by the agency of the two confessors, who are eligible intermediaries in their capacity of being men of the Church. The sacred nature of their task is communicated through the heavenly couple's gesturing towards them while the revelations are being offered to Birgitta. Finally, and importantly, in the presentation scene below and on the central vertical axis connecting heavenly origin and earthly recipient we find Alfonso and Peter, and not Birgitta. On the one hand, it thus seems that this illumination tones down the bold portrayal of the visionary as an evangelical author and writerly agent that is encountered on the frontispiece of the codex. In the present miniature, she is removed from the tools of writing, and she is even pushed out of the central vertical axis identifying the genesis, intermediaries, and recipients of the *Revelations*. Instead, Birgitta appears as a somewhat marginalized vessel through which the divine word passes untouched, and thereby uncorrupted by her (female) agency. On the other hand, although she seems to occupy a less important position in the present image in terms of its axial composition, Birgitta is, strikingly, the only figure in the illumination who is in contact with the celestial realm—not the confessors, and certainly not the bishop and the other religious men, who are placed in the diametrically opposed corner of the folio.

As in the two foregoing miniatures, a revered model from Christian iconography has been appropriated. In her study of the manuscripts, Creutzburg

39 ES: 6.

has demonstrated the connection between the depiction of Christ handing Birgitta the book of revelations and the iconography of Moses receiving the law, as well as the paleo-Christian motif *traditio legis*, which presents Christ handing a symbol of authority, usually represented as a support for writing, to Peter and Paul.[40] Once again, the evocative power of a well-known iconographical model is enlisted to emphasize Birgitta's divinely received authority. Here, the artist succeeds in establishing, enforcing, and legitimizing this privilege in a single scene: first, Birgitta assumes the role of Peter and Paul when she receives the codex of Christ, which traditionally represents a transferred mandate. Second, when the two confessors simultaneously receive the codex from Birgitta, her significance is bolstered through the parallels with the Christ figure in the *traditio* motif; Birgitta is the privileged figure who confers what she possesses unto another recipient. Finally, by *accepting* the codex from Birgitta, Alfonso and Peter, her spiritual fathers who are also representatives of the Church, visibly acknowledge the veridicality of Birgitta's visions and thereby sanction the *Revelations* through their reception of the book.

The thirteen historiated initials of the complete image cycle are, in general, based on the iconography of the larger illuminations.[41] In each of them, Birgitta is portrayed gazing at the celestial source of her visions or at a figure representing the content of the vision. Five of the initials feature the *traditio*, or presentation, theme, and in four initials the visionary is depicted in the act of writing or seated at her desk. For the very first of the historiated initials, following immediately after the frontispiece, where it serves to open the prologue composed by Mathias of Linköping, we see Mathias at a desk in front of a seated audience, to whom he is lecturing from the *Revelations*. The lecturing motif of the initial, an S that also includes the figure of Birgitta in the upper curve receiving a revelation from Christ and the Virgin, thus attests to the truthfulness of the revelations and emphasizes their epistemological status, because evidently they are worthy of being lectured on, as is Scripture or another authoritative work.[42]

There are numerous correspondences between the composition and iconography of the Birgittine codices and earlier biblical manuscripts from the

40 Creutzburg, "Darstellungen von göttlicher Inspiration"; Creutzburg, *Die heilige Birgitta von Schweden*, 212–21. On the *traditio legis*, see *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 4, cols 347–351.

41 For a presentation of the initials and their distribution in the respective codices, see Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*, vol. 1: 70–77. Vol. 2 contains reproductions of the complete cycle of historiated initials, 14–39.

42 The initial is found in all three MSS on fols 1r (Warsaw), 2r (Palermo), and 5r (New York), respectively.

same scriptorium. The initial from Master Mathias's prologue, for instance, resembles in many ways the lecturing theme found in the Vienna Bible, and notably the artist used the same visual scheme in the representation of Birgitta communicating with, or receiving visions from, Christ and the Virgin as employed for representations of the Old Testament prophets.[43] Additionally, other aspects of the Neapolitan *Revelations* codices, such as format, script, and mise-en-page, generate an association with illuminated biblical manuscripts from the same time and place.[44] All three copies are written in an Italian rounded Gothic minuscule, and, with the exception of the Warsaw codex—presumed to be the oldest in the group—the text is divided into two columns.[45] Along with the lavish miniatures and historiated initials, the large and richly gilded books are further adorned with decorative borders and initials, as well as numerous pen-flourished initials, all of which combine to suggest to the reader the importance of the text contained within, and induces, by material means, an association between the *Revelations* and Scripture.

5 Vernacular Portraits of the Visionary

From preserved letters penned by followers of Birgitta in the first decades after her death, we learn that the *Revelations* spread quickly in the form of richly decorated manuscripts, as exemplified by the Neapolitan codices, almost immediately after their compilation in the 1370s.[46] With the establishment of the first Birgittine monastery in Sweden, Vadstena Abbey, the *Revelations* came to be "re-translated" into Birgitta's mother tongue during the 1380s. Unfortunately, no books that contain the complete Old Swedish version have survived; the most comprehensive extant examples are from the 1420s and later.[47] With the exception of a few marginal figures, as well as one historiated initial, there are

43 Compare, for example, with fols 195v, 253r, and 271v in Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 1191.

44 Warsaw MS: 26 × 18 cm; Palermo MS: 37 × 26 cm; New York MS: approximately 26.5 × 19 cm. On illuminated Bibles from Naples in the Trecento, see Watteeuw and Van der Stock, *The Anjou Bible*; Bräm, *Neapolitanische Bilderbibeln*.

45 This MS contains the first, shorter redaction of Alfonso. For a history of the redactions, see the editor's introduction in Rev. 1.

46 See notes 3 and 14 above.

47 On the Old Swedish text and the MSS, see Roger Andersson, "A Modern Edition of the Old Swedish Text of the *Revelations*," in *The Birgittine Experience: Papers from the Birgitta Conference in Stockholm* 2011, eds. Claes Gejrot, Mia Åkestam, and Roger Andersson (Stockholm: 2013), 332–50; Roger Andersson, *Heliga Birgittas texter på fornsvenska. Birgittas Uppenbarelser*, vol. 1 (Stockholm: 2014), 11–29.

no figurative images in these codices. Interestingly, the one historiated initial we do have—fol. 3r in E8801 from the Swedish National Archives—is, in fact, an author portrait of Birgitta in which she is presented with pen in hand in the act of writing (Fig. 7.4).[48] In other words, one of the most unusual elements in the Neapolitan visual program found its way into this manuscript produced at the other end of Europe. In this historiated initial, the visionary is dressed as a Birgittine nun, wearing a black habit with a white veil and the characteristic crown with red spots on top, symbolizing the wounds of Christ left by the Crown of Thorns. Identification of the figure as the visionary is clear based on the halo around her head. In addition to her clothes, another notable difference in this vernacular author portrait of Birgitta is the conspicuous absence of any symbol of divine inspiration. Here, Birgitta is shown in accordance with any male author portrait: she is seated at her desk, and her gaze is directed toward the text she is writing. This is in contrast to the author portrait on the Neapolitan frontispiece, where she is cast as an evangelist with eyes turned toward the heavenly figures above her, who we are to understand as representing the true origin of the work. Does this mean that the producers of this book in Vadstena Abbey considered Birgitta's contribution to the production of the text to be more substantial than that of a divine instrument, or "human pen"?

In his discussion of Birgitta's authorial function in the present volume, Luongo notes that because the *Revelations* represented the visionary's main claim to sainthood, a complete reduction of Birgitta's role would not aid her case. While, as I would argue, the Neapolitan program of illuminations uses the equivocation of the visual medium as a rhetorical strategy—simultaneously presenting Birgitta as a "mere" vessel under the control of her confessors, the agents of the *Revelations*' publication, while also depicting her with pen in hand and visibly closer to God than any bishop or theologian—the text employs other strategies to articulate, and to legitimize, what could be understood as the joint authorship of God, Birgitta, and her human collaborators.[49] Within the context of the Birgittine monastery, particularly after the canonization, an acknowledgement of Birgitta's authorial agency was not a threat to the *Revelations*' "heavenly" status, as the author was, demonstrably, one of God's saints. Thus, it is interesting to note that when images of Birgitta finally began to appear and spread in her native country, promoted by the Birgittine Order, the representation of the writing woman not only came to serve as the motif of Vadstena's pilgrim

48 The codex, which is dated to the first quarter of the 15th century, is one of the manuscripts with the most complete text. For a description, see Andersson, *Heliga Birgittas texter*, vol. 1: 12.

49 See Chapter 1 by F. Thomas Luongo in the present volume.



FIGURE 7.4 *Initial with Author Portrait of St Birgitta of Sweden*. Stockholm, Riksarkivet, E8801, fol. 3r. Date: First quarter of 15th century.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE SWEDISH NATIONAL ARCHIVES

badge, but it also became the primary subject of her saint's portrait in Sweden. In Italy, it was the motif of Birgitta in the cave in Bethlehem beholding the revelation of the Nativity of Christ that became the primary subject of the first devotional images of the saint. In Sweden, however, we find that the Nativity vision often appears as one among other narrative scenes related to her life, and that the saint's portrait, or devotional image, of St Birgitta is the bold author portrait of her, captured in the act of composing the *Revelations*.[50] In other words, in Sweden, the conceptualization of the visionary's sanctity came to be intimately connected to the *Revelations*, which were seen not only to be the result of God "employing" a human medium, but as something produced by the *saint* Birgitta, with heavenly support and authorization.

The author portrait of the visionary writing the *Revelations* also found its way into Italian translations of the corpus. Although the illuminations in these codices usually include a symbol of heavenly inspiration, the confessors fall away from the visual scheme, and the figure of Birgitta herself becomes the focal point of the illuminations in a more obvious way. One example is a twin-codex from Siena (Biblioteca comunale degli Intronati, I.V.25/26), which represents the earliest material evidence of an Italian translation of the *Revelations*.[51] The manuscript has a simpler pictorial program composed of a Birgitta author portrait miniature (fol. 11v) and six historiated initials.[52] In the author portrait, contained inside an elegant rectangular frame covering approximately two thirds of the folio, Birgitta is shown by her desk at work over a codex. A round halo clearly surrounds the covered head of the large figure of the saint, attired in the same clothes as she wears throughout the Neapolitan cycle, though here she is depicted younger, and she looks up toward a miniature representation of Christ rendered as a half-length figure. Christ is carried by red seraphs, and this visual element extends up into the upper frame of the image.

Compared to the Neapolitan illuminations, the visual program of this vernacular manuscript is simpler in its expression. The complex iconography

50 This includes representations of Birgitta on altarpieces, both as the main cult image and saint's portraits on external doors, as well as in frescoes and in wooden sculptures. On images of Birgitta in Sweden, see Mereth Lindgren, *Bilden av Birgitta* (Höganäs: 1991).

51 Domenico Pezzini, "Il primo volgarizzamento italiano delle Rivelazioni e degli altri scritti di S. Brigida: Il codice I.V.25/26 della Biblioteca degli Intronati di Siena (1399)," in Ferm, Perriccioli Saggese, and Rotili, *Santa Brigida, Napoli L'Italia*.

52 The illuminations are reproduced in Cristina De Benedictis (ed.), *La Miniatura Senese 1270–1420* (Milan: 2002), 214–15 and 335. For a more comprehensive treatment of the author portrait in this manuscript, I refer to my forthcoming article "Ambivalent Images of Authorship," in *Sanctity and Female Authorship in the 14th Century and Beyond: Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena*, eds. Maria H. Oen and Unn Falkeid (New York).

of the frontispiece in the New York codex, in which a powerful argument regarding the legitimacy of Birgitta's public role and authorial status is put forth and strengthened by means of the representation of numerous witnesses, is here replaced by a more straightforward organization. Yet the first, but also the largest and most important image, as on the Neapolitan frontispiece, is an author portrait of Birgitta with a pen in her hand. And although the claimed derivation of the *Revelations* is portrayed in the form of Christ carried by seraphs above the writer's head, the simple scheme of the one large figure of the visionary at work over a codex, with a pen in one hand, a knife in the other, and ink spilled over the desk, emphasizes Birgitta's authorial agency to a higher degree than in the Neapolitan frontispiece. Significantly, as in the Swedish initial, Birgitta has a halo around her head. That is, in these later vernacular codices she is presented visually more like a saintly author in her own right than as a vessel. The focus on Birgitta as the *writer* of the *Revelations* is supported by the translator's original prologue. The text offers an introduction to the author, Birgitta, and, in addition to giving a number of arguments for the authenticity of the work—one of which is that Birgitta was canonized by the pope, something he would never have done had the *Revelations* not been truthful—the prologue draws attention to the fact that Alfonso of Jaén had taken care of the precious relic of her finger "with which she wrote" (*col quale ella scrivea*) the revelations.[53]

Another version of Birgitta's author-cum-scribe portrait is found in a slightly later codex from Florence.[54] The frontispiece, on fol. 1r (Fig. 7.5), has two pen drawings. In the upper half, Birgitta is depicted frontally seated at her desk with a pen in her right hand. The visionary, who is placed inside an architectural construction that opens up toward the viewer by means of a large, rounded arch, gazes up to her right, where the half-length figure of Christ supported by seraphs partly covers the left pilaster of the arch. In the lower half of the same folio, another simpler architectural structure opens towards the viewer. Inside is a Nativity of Christ scene, where the iconographical rendering is in accordance with the vision of Birgitta described in the *Revelations* (Rev. VII: 21), which was also the subject of Niccolò di Tommaso's first panel paintings of the 1370s.[55] A kneeling figure of Birgitta is presented together with the Virgin and Joseph, precisely as in the paintings, but her placement, within or

53 See Pezzini's transcription in "Il primo volgarizzamento," 69.

54 Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. II. II. 393. On the dating of the MS and its relation to the Siena translation, see Domenico Pezzini, "The Italian Reception of Birgittine Writings," in O'Mara and Morris, *The Translation of the Works of St. Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval Vernaculars*, 204–5.

55 For a discussion of this iconography, see Oen, "Iconography and Visions."



FIGURE 7.5 *St Birgitta of Sweden Writing the Revelations / St Birgitta's Revelation of the Nativity of Christ*. Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. II. II. 393, fol. 1r. Date: first quarter of 15th century.
PHOTO: F. THOMAS LUONGO. COURTESY OF BIBLIOTECA NAZIONALE CENTRALE DI FIRENZE

outside the stable, is ambiguous. Here we find, behind Birgitta on the outside of the stable, a kneeling man dressed in secular clothes. The figure, which in all likelihood represents the owner of the manuscript, appears to be adoring Birgitta and, at the same time, to be led by her, to participate in her devotion of the Christ Child. On this frontispiece we thus find the first two examples of Birgitta's iconography, originally intended for two different purposes and in two different media but here united in one image, in a single medium: Birgitta with pen in hand—her author portrait that opens the *Revelations* manuscripts; and Birgitta receiving the vision of the Nativity of Christ—the motif employed in paintings meant to serve as devotional portraits. Thus, a Birgitta motif that was initially depicted in paintings and did not have a set function in early copies of the *Revelations* now enters into the visual program of the text alongside the author portrait, which is thereby invested with more layers of meaning by virtue of the new juxtapositions in addition to the compositional changes that have been discussed.

The inclusion of the Bethlehem vision together with Birgitta's author portrait on the frontispiece to the book suggests that her authorial role was not considered problematic by the early-15th-century owner of the manuscript. Rather, it seems that her status as a prophetic author and, indeed, *writer* had become part and parcel of her saintly persona. In one of the earliest preserved Middle English versions of the *Revelations* (London, British Library, Cotton Claudius B I), an early-15th-century illuminated manuscript whose translation is based directly on Alfonso's first redaction, the first folio is missing, making it impossible to establish whether or not it included an author portrait of Birgitta.[56] An illustration of the writing visionary is, however, found on fol. 117r (Fig. 7.6), where it opens Book III. Within a framed rectangle inserted into one of the two columns on the folio, there is a representation of Birgitta seated on a throne to the right. Dressed in a dark robe with a white wimple and a round halo around her head, she is writing in a codex in her lap. To the left stands a bishop with a crozier in his left hand, and with his right he is bestowing a gesture of benediction on Birgitta. The motif corresponds to the text, which, according to its prologue, contains admonitions to a bishop. In the Neapolitan

56 This is the only illuminated Middle English version of the *Revelations* that has been preserved. For a comprehensive treatment of the MS and its illuminations, see Joan Isobel Friedman, "MS Cotton Claudius B.I.: A Middle English Edition of St Bridget of Sweden's *Liber Celestis*," in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge, U.K.: 1996), 91–113. For the text, see Roger Ellis (ed.), *The Liber Celestis of St Bridget of Sweden: The Middle English Version in British Library MS Claudius B I, Together with a Life of the Saint from the Same Manuscript* (Oxford: 1987).



FIGURE 7.6 *St Birgitta of Sweden Presents a Revelation from Christ to a Bishop*. London, British Library, Cotton MS Claudius B I, fol. 117r. Date: first quarter of 15th century.
PHOTO: © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD (COTTON MS CLAUDIUS B I)

manuscripts, Book III opens with an initial portraying a bishop, but there the motif is rendered as a presentation scene, with Birgitta receiving a book from Christ and simultaneously offering it to the bishop.[57] Here, however, the bishop's blessing clearly indicates approval of the message coming from Birgitta, and he is paired with an enthroned Birgitta rendered in the act of writing, and with a conspicuous absence of any symbol of divine inspiration.

The sumptuously decorated manuscript has only two further miniatures and no historiated initials. In these two works the content of the images relates directly to the text. The first, on fol. 34r, (Fig. 7.7) depicts Birgitta kneeling and gazing up at the Virgin, who stands to the right and bears a crown, while John the Baptist stands behind the saint. The motif renders visible a vision Birgitta had of Mary with an elaborate crown, the meaning of which was explained to her by John (Rev. 1: 31). The second miniature in the codex, on fol. 270r, (Fig. 7.8) relates directly to Chapter 21 of the book it opens, which is, Birgitta's vision of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The framed illumination displays a simplified version of the Birgittine Nativity iconography.[58] Here, in addition to the background figures of the ox and ass, only the Virgin and Birgitta are present on either side of the Christ Child, who lies on the ground, surrounded by light, comporting with the vision text. Furthermore, in accordance with the *Revelations*, the Virgin kneels with hands clasped in prayer, and her blonde hair is loose. The visionary, whose halo and scale are identical to Mary's, mirrors the position of the Virgin as in the Italian versions of the iconography. Thus, her kneeling position, the same as in the first miniature of the codex, and her halo, which is commensurate with those of the other saintly figures in the illuminations of the manuscript, suggest the images' devotional function; the viewer is invited to imitate Birgitta in her devotions, and at the same time to pray to the saint Birgitta. Although the style of the illuminations, their iconography, and their distribution in relation to the text differ from that of the Florentine manuscript, the visual program of this Middle English translation of the *Revelations*, like that of the Italian one, gives the impression that the commissioner of the work perceived Birgitta's authorial role to be a significant part of her saintly character, and it is exactly as such, i.e. as a *saintly author*, that the reader is invited to venerate her.[59]

57 In the Neapolitan codices the initial is found on fols 98r (Warsaw), 43v (Palermo), and 93r (New York).

58 For the Birgittine Nativity iconography, see Oen, "Iconography and Visions."

59 Friedman sees the style of the illuminations as typical English International Gothic. Based on this, among several other arguments, she suggests that the manuscript was commissioned by a wealthy layperson and produced in England, see Friedman, "MS Cotton Claudius B.I."



FIGURE 7.7 *St John the Baptist Interprets a Vision of the Virgin to St Birgitta of Sweden*. London, British Library, Cotton MS Claudius B I, fol. 34r. Date: first quarter of 15th century.
PHOTO: © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD (COTTON MS CLAUDIUS B I)



FIGURE 7.8 *St Birgitta of Sweden's Revelation of the Nativity of Christ*. London, British Library, Cotton MS Claudius B I, fol. 270r. Date: first quarter of 15th century. PHOTO: © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD (COTTON MS CLAUDIUS B I)

6 Birgitta as the Author of a Rule

As we have seen thus far, the images accompanying the *Revelations* developed in new ways as the text was copied and translated in different contexts. After Birgitta's canonization, in 1391, the need to legitimize the text and tackle the question of her role as a woman instructing on religious matters in public was less urgent. This can explain the developments in her author portrait as a scribe, and the disappearance of images of the confessors, who had such a prominent place in the Neapolitan cycle, where they act as Birgitta's mediators. Furthermore, after the canonization, we see other, and even novel, Birgittine motifs with a devotional function finding their way into the *Revelations* corpus, notably the subject of the Nativity vision. At the same time, the author-cum-scribe portrait of Birgitta, so radical when it first appeared, is transformed in Sweden into a devotional image of the saint. These changes in the Birgittine iconography, and especially in the context of the *Revelations*, render visible developments in the perception of Birgitta's authorial status. But despite the confirmation of her sanctity, the status of the work was continuously debated. The prologue to the Sienese twin-codex from 1399, in which the bulk of the text is a defense of the veridicality of the text and Birgitta's prophetic role, bears testimony to this, as does the written evidence from the Councils of Constance and Basel in the following decades, in which the name of Birgitta or the *Liber celestis* appears several times.[60] Much of the criticism of the *Revelations* had to do with its claim to a divine genesis, and in 1436 the Council of Basel decided on a prohibition of the promulgation of the *Revelations* as "heavenly," thereby paradoxically turning Birgitta into the "sole" author of what was by then an extremely popular work in Europe.[61]

An additional subject that first appeared early on in the iconography of the *Revelations* and that grew in popularity during the 15th and 16th centuries is connected to Birgitta's status as the foundress of a monastic order and the author of a rule. The mother house of the order, in Vadstena, was established already in the 1380s, and within a few years the order had spread to other regions, starting with the foundation of a house in Florence.[62] This motif, which appears for the first time in the form of a historiated initial introducing the *Regula Salvatoris* on fol. 162r in the Palermo codex (the only one of

60 See Chapter 4 by Anna Fredriksson in the present work.

61 With the striking exception of France; see André Vauchez, "Saint Bridget's Revelations in France at the End of the Middle Ages," in *Santa Brigida, profeta dei tempi nuovi* (Rome: 1993).

62 On Vadstena Abbey, see Chapter 5 by Birgitta Fritz in the present work. On the Birgittines in Florence, see Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby's Chapter 8.

the Neapolitan manuscripts to include this text), depicts Birgitta presenting her rule to the members of her order.[63] The iconography of the initial is based on the *traditio legis* type of Christ handing over the law/authority. Within a few decades after the production of the Palermo manuscript, the subject of Birgitta presenting the rule becomes added as a fourth full-page illumination in the Neapolitan visual program. The first evidence of this motif is found in a severely damaged manuscript now in Turin (Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, I.III.23), which has been attributed to the same scriptorium as the oldest preserved *Revelations* codices, albeit dated later, to the beginning of the 15th century.[64] The miniature was originally placed before the *Regula*, where it appeared as the last full-page illumination in a cycle otherwise identical to that in the Neapolitan codices.[65] Like the other full-page illuminations discussed here, it is divided horizontally into heavenly and terrestrial registers, with a mandorla centered at the top of the image. Directly below the mandorla, seated at a desk, is a large frontal figure of Birgitta, her head surrounded by a golden halo. A white stripe issuing from the mandorla above—the ray of supernatural light—culminates at her head. Birgitta holds out scrolls in each of her hands, which are received by the nuns and the brethren of her double order, who are gathered into distinct groups kneeling to either side of her. Directly below the visionary is a miniature representation of a church, which may refer to the first church of the order, in Vadstena, built between 1390 and the early 1420s, but also to Birgitta's monastic order itself.

The illumination, its iconography again following that of the *traditio legis*, also renders visible by means of the characteristic ray of light a claim made in the text and emphasized by Alfonso: the rule was received in an instant as a divine revelation.[66] By evoking the *traditio* motif, the authority of the rule is further strengthened. Indeed, this particular iconographical citation is not idiosyncratic to the Birgittine visual program, but a commonly used model for depictions of the presentation of a monastic rule. That the motif has acquired this function only bolsters the validity of Birgitta's rule, by the reference to the transfer of divine authority, as well as through the visual association with other authors of monastic rules.

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63 For a reproduction, see Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgitta*, vol. 2: 35.

64 The principal difference between the earlier three codices and the Turin version is that in the latter Birgitta appears with a round golden halo, thus indicating its production after 1391. For the dating of the MS and more, see Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*, vol. 1: 54–55; 103–7. On the fourth full-page illumination, see also Svanberg and Aili, "Två tidiga Birgittahandskrifter."

65 The folio was moved after conservation.

66 ES: 4.

When this fourth full-page illumination was inserted into the rhetorically dense series of large miniatures in the Neapolitan cycle, the Birgittine Order was struggling to establish itself, with respect to both the rule and the notion of an independent monastic order with its own privileges. The *Regula* had actually never received papal ratification, and over the years since the approval of the construction of a monastery in Vadstena whose inhabitants followed the Augustinian rule, several bulls had been issued giving and withdrawing decisions and privileges that concerned the Birgittine Order.[67] This is the background against which we should understand the appearance of the new motif. The Turin illuminations employ the same visual strategy to legitimize the new Birgittine rule and monastic order, symbolized by the scroll and the church, respectively, as we have seen in the other full-page illuminations of the program. The ray of supernatural light underlines the heavenly genesis of the rule, and the axial structure suggests Birgitta's position as the mediator of God's will. In later examples of this motif, such as the frontispiece to an Italian early-15th-century manuscript containing only the *Regula* (Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, A 75), Birgitta's authoritative role is further emphasized by replacing the writing desk with a throne, and dramatically increasing the scale of her figure (Fig. 7.9). In this full-page illumination, set within a blue frame surrounded by sumptuous foliate borders, the scrolls Birgitta hands to the members of her order have been replaced by codices, and instead of the church below her figure, a crown is placed at her feet, referring to her hagiographical status as "princess of Närke" (*principessa Nericie*).[68] Here, there is no heavenly register, but Christ and the Virgin appear as half-length figures in miniature, hovering in the air above Birgitta, to her right. The haloed saint turns her gaze toward them, and Christ directs a gesture of benediction towards her.

7 Conclusion

The first phase of the campaign conceived to prove Birgitta's sanctity after her death in 1373 was the compilation and publication of her revelations, which would serve as the primary evidence of her case. Based on extant manuscripts, in particular the three codices produced in Naples, we can maintain that a visual program was developed to form an integral part of the *Revelations*. The purpose of this elaborate illuminations program was to legitimize the text, in

67 See Bridget Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden* (Woodbridge: 1999), 160–77. Parts of the rule were added as constitutions to the Augustinian rule in the Birgittine houses.

68 Birgitta is given this title in the *Vita*, see AP, 74.



FIGURE 7.9 *St Birgitta of Sweden Presenting the Rule of the Savior to Members of Her Order*. Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, A 75, fol. 1v. Date: early 15th century.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ROYAL LIBRARY OF STOCKHOLM

which the calls for political and spiritual reform could be seen as quite controversial, but also to substantiate the claim that Birgitta was worthy of sainthood. The cycle of images contains a highly original iconography that strategically cites authoritative and revered visual models, where the meaning is linked to Scripture (the evangelist portrait), divine knowledge (the heavenly ladder), and authority (the *traditio legis*). In this manner, the equivocal visual medium was utilized to shape the reception of the text and of Birgitta. The images offer powerful arguments regarding Birgitta's role as evangelical author, whose revealed knowledge assumes priority over the scholastic method of knowledge acquisition; and, at the same time, they mitigate potential criticism by placing her visibly under the control of her confessors, who also serve as the public mediators of the text. The *Revelations* were thus presented, through a set of frontispieces and historiated initials, as the Word of God, communicated through Birgitta, and validated and published by her spiritual fathers.

An exhaustive examination of all the extant illuminated codices containing the *Revelations*, from their first compilation in the 1370s to the first printed editions from the end of the following century, is not possible here. But I have sought, by way of a serial approach to the iconography of a selection of manuscripts and with a particular focus on the author portrait of Birgitta, to demonstrate the significance of graphic images for the dissemination of the work from the very beginning of its publication, and to show how the later developments and modifications in the iconography indicate changes in the perception of her authorial function. In the examined manuscripts stemming from the period after the canonization, which were produced in different regional, social, and linguistic contexts, we have seen that in some of them the symbol of divine inspiration is omitted altogether, whereas in others it is reduced in size, and the figure of the writing Birgitta becomes the clear focal point, as she labors over the codex with knife and pen in hand. In vernacular codices produced for lay commissioners, it is evident that the female author-cum-scribe portrait that was so unusual prior to being associated with St Birgitta became fused with motifs that have a clear devotional function. This transformation thus implies that the visionary's role as the writer of the *Revelations* had become a part of her attributes and of her saintly persona. Thus, whereas in the 1370s strategies for legitimizing the text and proving Birgitta's sanctity included attempts to demonstrate the exclusive heavenly origin of the *Revelations*, in later images of the saint, and "officially" after the judgement of 1436, St Birgitta is cast in the role as the originator of the work, though now the revelations are not the products of a "mere" woman, but those of a saint. To this it should be added that although, as we have seen, new versions of the iconography of the *Revelations* appear in different contexts, the original image cycle continued

to be reproduced even as there were perennial deliberations over the status of the text and its author. The early-15th-century manuscript in Turin is one example of this, as are examples produced in Northern Europe, possibly in connection with the church councils during which the *Revelations* were a subject of debate.[69]

69 The production of Kungliga Biblioteket, A 70 b, has been connected both to the Council of Constance (Nordenfalk, "Saint Bridget of Sweden," 386–88) and the Council of Basel (Mereth Lindgren, *Heliga Birgittas uppenbarelser 650 år. En jubileumsutställning av latinska handskrifter och editioner tryckta 1492–1992* [Lund: 1995], 29). Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, theol. lat. fol. 33 was most likely produced in the Birgittine abbey of Marienboem around the middle of the 15th century.

CHAPTER 8

Reshaping Birgitta of Sweden in Tuscan Art and Sermons

Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby

In the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York there is a sculpted panel whose motif has been identified as St Birgitta of Sweden receiving the rule of her order. The panel was commissioned from the Florentine master Agostino di Duccio in 1459 for the predella of the altar of San Lorenzo in San Domenico, Perugia (Fig. 8.1). The altar itself was large, with cornices and garlanded decorations, and it included portrayals of the Virgin and Child, St John the Baptist, St Lawrence, St Peter the Martyr, and St Birgitta, all of whom were patron saints of the deceased's family. In the symbolic scene carved on the panel, St Birgitta, whose attribute in this work is a sphinx, is seated, and the young Christ presents her with the rule of her order in the form of a scroll. With the exception



FIGURE 8.1 Agostino di Duccio. *St Birgitta of Sweden Receiving the Rule.* Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Date: 1459.
PHOTO: ASAP CREATIVE/AKG-IMAGES

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of Birgitta's attribute, the scene corresponds to a vision described in the saint's *Revelations*.[1] The unusual renderings and placements of the figures in the image have puzzled many scholars and have thus led to a wide range of interpretations regarding the subject of the image.[2]

The particular issues related to this enigmatic work and the difficulties in identifying its precise significance are typical features of the study of the images of St Birgitta in Italian Renaissance art. This chapter examines the reception of Birgitta in artworks and in sermons in Tuscany from the late 14th century through the 16th century. The city of Florence, where the first Birgittine monastery outside of Sweden was founded, will serve as the main focus. It will be demonstrated that artists and their patrons seem to have contributed to the development of the cult of St Birgitta, partly in response to the flourishing cults of the admired female saints of the mendicant orders, and additionally that the representation of Birgitta influenced the iconography for established saints, such as St Clare of Assisi (1194–1253). While there are several artworks in which the identification of Birgitta is certain, there are those images where it is difficult to conclusively identify the Swedish saint and the particular motif, because the evolution of Birgittine iconography in this region included elements borrowed from the iconography typical of other local holy women, with the resulting images of Birgitta, in turn, having an impact on these existing traditions. This point is illustrated by the New York marble panel. Furthermore, the various groups of people promoting Birgitta's cult in Tuscany—which included preachers, hagiographers, and theologians, as well as friars, nuns, and their patrons and patronesses—tended to emphasize different facets of her history.

Within this investigation, I will focus especially on the activities of the Pisan Dominican prioress Chiara Gambacorta (1362–1420), the Florentine tertiary Domenica da Paradiso (1473–1553), and the Dominican preacher Beatus Giovanni Dominici (1356–1419), who devoted his homiletic efforts toward promoting the cult of Birgitta. Visual and textual sources from Tuscany reveal that Birgitta of Sweden played an important role in Dominican and Franciscan contexts, both before and alongside the establishment of a Birgittine house in this region. Thus, this chapter also serves as an attempt to evaluate the place of the visionary and her *Revelations* in art and sermons from these three different

1 Regarding the scene in which St Birgitta is given the rule, see "Regula Sanctis Salvatoris data divinitus ab ore Jesu Christi devotae Sponsae Sanctae Brigittae de Regno Svetiae," quoted in Igino Cecchetti, "Brigida di Svezia," in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* (Rome: 1963), vol. 3, cols 439–504, at col. 470.

2 The discussion of the Duccio's relief is based on Ian Wardropper, "European Sculpture, 1400–1900," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* 3 (2011): 16–19.

religious milieus, and to explore the distinct manner of representing Birgitta within the respective orders.

It is not clear whether or not Birgitta herself ever visited Florence, but during her sojourn in Italy, which lasted for more than two decades, she acquired powerful friends from the city, among them members of the Acciaiuoli family. Niccolò Acciaiuoli, banker and advisor to Birgitta's promotor and protector, Queen Johanna I of Naples, was numbered among them, as was his sister, Lapa Buondelmonte Acciaiuoli, and their brother the Dominican friar Angelo Acciaiuoli. The Acciaiuolis, or places directly connected to the family, would come to play a significant role in spreading the cult of the Swedish visionary from Rome and Naples to Florence.[3] With respect to the visual tradition, the cult of Birgitta originated in Naples, where three paintings of the visionary were commissioned by the Florentine artist Niccolò di Tommaso, then working for Queen Johanna, between 1373 and 1375.[4] Soon thereafter, in the latter half of the 1370s, richly illuminated copies of the *Revelations*, which included portraits of Birgitta, were produced in a Neapolitan scriptorium.[5]

Within a few decades, portraits of Birgitta would appear in other places in Italy, notably in buildings in Florence connected to the Acciaiuolis.[6] Although no longer extant, there is evidence of a letter from Birgitta to Lapa Acciaiuoli.[7] In December 1373, following Birgitta's death in her own house, in Rome, Francesca Papazzuri, a Roman noblewoman and friend of Birgitta, wrote to Lapa

3 On Birgitta's activity in Italy, see Mary Ann Rossi, "St. Birgitta Social Activism: The Rome Years," in *Studies in St. Birgitta and the Brigittine Order*, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg: 1993), vol. 1: 49–64; Maria H. Oen, "Sight, Body and Imagery in the Visionary Experiences of Birgitta," in *The Birgittine Experience: Papers from the Birgitta Conference in Stockholm 2011*, eds. Claes Gejrot, Mia Åkestam, and Roger Andersson (Stockholm: 2013), 190–208.

4 These paintings, all of which depict Birgitta's vision of the Nativity of Christ that she received in Bethlehem, are now in the Vatican Pinacoteca, the Johnson Collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Yale University Art Gallery. See Erling Skaug, "St. Bridget's Vision of the Nativity and Niccolò di Tommaso's Late Period," *Arte Cristiana* 89, no. 804 (2002): 195–209; Hans Aili and Jan Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae: The Earliest Illuminated Manuscripts and Panel Paintings Related to the Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, 2 vols (Stockholm: 2003), esp. 89–101. On the identification of the artist, see also Richard Offner, *Studies in Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century* (New York: 1927), 114–16.

5 See Carl Nordenfalk, "Saint Birgitta of Sweden as Represented in Illuminated Manuscripts," in *De artibus opuscula XL: Essays in Honour of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss (New York: 1961), 371–93; Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*. The illuminations are analysed and reproduced in Chapter 7 in the present volume.

6 See Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, "The Images of Saint Birgitta of Sweden in Santa Maria Novella in Florence," *Renaissance Studies* 26 (2004): 509–18; Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, "St. Birgitta in Florentine Art," in Gejrot, Åkestam, and Andersson, *The Birgittine Experience*, 171–89.

7 Firenze, Archivio di Stato, Carte Strozziane, Serie Prima, CCCLII.

Acciaiuoli about commissioning a painting for the Papazzuri home. Later, portraits of Birgitta, such as the marble sculpture by Andrea della Robbia depicting the visionary with her Pilgrim Cross and her book of *Revelations*, appeared in the grand monastery of Certosa del Galluzzo in Florence, the building of which, between 1341 and 1365, was financed by Niccolò Acciaiuoli.[8] Interestingly, the very first images of Birgitta in Florence appear in the church belonging to the Dominican Order in which Lapa and Niccolò's brother Angelo was a member, namely, Santa Maria Novella. In the following section, I will examine these earliest Florentine images of Birgitta in the Dominican context, before turning to the reception of the saint in Franciscan artworks, and then to sources stemming from the Birgittine monastery Paradiso.[9]

1 Birgitta and the Dominicans in Florence and Beyond

The Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella began to take on its present form in the 13th century, and by 1311 a *studium*, a school for monastic higher education, had been established in the friary.[10] Within the church, situated near the main entrance on the inside of the façade wall, is a fresco that includes a depiction of Birgitta, now attributed to the little-known artist Pietro di Miniato and dated to the late 14th or early 15th century (Fig. 8.2). The image presents the saint in the context of her famous revelation of the Nativity of Christ.[11]

The long-recognized influence of Birgitta on art is reflected in this scene.[12] In this vision, which she is said to have experienced during a pilgrimage to Bethlehem, Birgitta witnessed the Virgin dressed in a white gown, having cast off her outer garment and shoes, adoring the newly born Christ Child, who lay naked on the ground, shining and aglow.[13] Birgitta's account of the Virgin

8 On the Luca della Robbia relief, see Mereth Lindgren, *Bilden av Birgitta* (Stockholm: 2002).

9 On Birgitta and Florence, see Julia Bolton Holloway, *Saint Bride and Her Book: St. Birgitta's Revelations* (Woodbridge: 2000), "Introduction."

10 On Santa Maria Novella, see Richard A. Turner, *Renaissance Florence: The Invention of a New Art* (New York: 1997), 79–82; on its *studium*, see Michele Mulchahey, *First the Bow Is Bent in Study: Dominican Education* (Toronto: 1998).

11 For the revelation, see Rev. VII: 21.

12 On St Birgitta's iconography, see George Kaftal, *The Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting* (Florence: 1952), 218–20; Vincent Mayr, "Birgitta von Schweden," in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 5 (1973), cols 400–404; Vida J. Hull, "The Sex of the Saviour in Renaissance Art: The *Revelations* of Saint Birgitta and the Nude Christ Child in Renaissance Art," *Studies in Iconography* 15 (1993): 77–112.

13 For a discussion of other examples of St Birgitta's vision of the Nativity in the Tuscan context see Offner, *Studies in Florentine Painting*, 198–99.



FIGURE 8.2 Pietro di Miniato, *Annunciation.* Santa Maria Novella, Florence. Date: *c.* 1400. PHOTO: ASAP CREATIVE/AKG-IMAGES/ORSI BATTAGLINI

birth introduced a new iconography of the Nativity to art.[14] In contrast to traditional depictions of the scene, which typically included the swaddled infant lying in a manger beside his reclining mother, the new motif presented the Madonna adoring the miraculously born infant, following what was, according to what Birgitta beheld, a childbirth that was painless and instantaneous. The Birgittine vision was considered a more emotional and mystical interpretation of the birth, one that focused on the spiritual experience rather than on the humble setting. The image of the radiant, nude infant became immediately popular in art.

The *Annunciation* is the central theme of the fresco in Santa Maria Novella, with three small depictions below it: the *Nativity*, with the *Annunciation to the Shepherds* in the background; the *Adoration of the Magi*; and the *Baptism of Christ* (Fig. 8.3). The attribution of this fresco to Pietro di Miniato is based on stylistic grounds rather than on documentary evidence.[15] The identification of the figure of Birgitta, portrayed in the lower register, is supported by the subject of the scene, the Nativity of Christ, which is presented exactly as Birgitta experienced it, with the saint herself depicted in the lower right-hand corner as a middle-aged woman dressed in black with a halo around her head. The iconography is also very similar to the three above-mentioned paintings by Niccolò di Tommaso, which offer the same motif and are also the oldest extant images of Birgitta. The scene in Santa Maria Novella, just as in Niccolò's images, depicts Mary and Joseph on either side of the Child, who thereby becomes the focal point of their devotion. Light radiates from both the Virgin and the Child. Other details from the conventional iconography of the Nativity are also included: the ox and the ass, the adoring angels, and, in the distance, the annunciation to the shepherds. Moreover, the Nativity scene is presented in a grotto.

Pietro di Miniato's fresco is but one example of a Birgittine Nativity in Tuscan art. Others include Martino di Bartolomeo's, which forms part of the predella of the altarpiece of San Domenico in Pisa, and *Saint Birgitta's Vision of the Nativity*, attributed to Turino Vanni, now in the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo

14 This is the argument of Henrik Cornell in "The Iconography of the Nativity," *Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift* (1924): 1–101, where he discusses this "Birgittine" version as the "Renaissance type" of Nativity. See also Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1953), 125; Maria H. Oen, "Iconography and Visions: St. Birgitta's Revelation of the Nativity of Christ," in *The Locus of Meaning in Medieval Art: Iconography, Iconology and Interpreting the Visual Imagery of the Middle Ages*, ed. Lena Liepe (Berlin: 2019).

15 On this artist and his activity as a painter in Florence and Prato, see Enrica Lusanna Neri, "Un ciclo di affreschi domenicano e l'attività tarda di Pietro di Miniato," *Arte Cristiana* 710 (1985): 301–14.



FIGURE 8.3 Pietro di Miniato, *Annunciation: The Scene of the Nativity.* Santa Maria Novella, Florence. Date: *c.* 1400.
PHOTO: ASAP CREATIVE/AKG-IMAGES/ORSI BATTAGLINI

in Pisa.[16] It should also be remembered that the artist responsible for the first three images of this motif, Niccolò di Tommaso, was a Florentine artist. A further Florentine example of a Birgittine Nativity, by Giovanni di Paolo, depicts the Virgin surrounded by light as she kneels before a shining Christ.[17] Although Birgitta is not present in the scene, the Virgin's utterance "*ipsum quem genuit adoravit*"—a direct citation from Birgitta's *Revelations*—is written out, the words forming a serpentine line between Mary and the Child, thus confirming the identification of the iconography as "Birgittine."

Some of the motifs in Pietro di Miniato's fresco in Santa Maria Novella appear to have influenced other artworks found nearby in the same church, in particular *The Nativity* with *The Adoration of the Child* on the second panel of the marble pulpit designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, with the panels created by Buggiano between 1443 and 1448. The pulpit is a cylindrical structure of gilded white marble, adorned with four rectangular reliefs depicting scenes from the life of the Virgin. In addition to the Birgittine *Nativity*, it includes the *Annunciation*, the *Presentation at the Temple*, and the *Assumption of the Virgin* as the subjects of its reliefs.[18] But whereas the earlier depictions of the Birgittine Nativity included an image of St Birgitta herself, such as in the Pietro di Miniato fresco and the panels of Niccolò di Tommaso, in later works, such as this one on the pulpit and the aforementioned di Paolo *Nativity*, the saint herself does not appear, and we see only her vision.

One might perhaps detect the influence of Pietro di Miniato's fresco in the pulpit's version of the *Nativity*/*Adoration of the Child* in the general arrangement, with the Virgin on the left, the Child on the ground, and Joseph on the right side. There are, however, differences in Joseph's posture, as he is seated with his hands clasped in prayer, while in the fresco he stands, with his arms crossed over his chest in a gesture of humility or submission. The two adoring angels on the pulpit, one of them surrounded by rays of light, are similar to the angels in the fresco in their poses and gestures, and the emphasis on light. A further example of a possible Birgittine Nativity in Santa Maria Novella is a fresco by Sandro Botticelli made in 1476, situated close to both the pulpit and to the Pietro di Miniato fresco. However, here there are differences, thus complicating an identification of the subject as "Birgittine." Mary is again in a

16 For a discussion of other examples, see Frederick Antal, *Florentine Painting and Its Social Background* (London: 1948), 226–27. Antal disagrees with Cornell, who called the Santa Maria Novella fresco the first representation of the new Nativity, arguing that the earliest depiction of this theme was by Niccolò di Tommaso.

17 The Giovanni di Paolo image is discussed in Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*.

18 On the pulpit of Santa Maria Novella, see Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, "Patrons, Artists, Preachers: The Pulpit of Santa Maria Novella (1443–1448)," *Arte Cristiana* 811 (2002): 261–72.

posture of adoration, but the Christ Child is partly covered by a cloth, and he lies on a blanket rather than on the bare ground. It is interesting to note that all these (possible) images of a Birgittine Nativity are located in one area of the church: near the pulpit in close proximity to the church's main entrance. During religious services, the laity occupied this area of the church, in the lower nave. Thus, the Birgittine images were more easily viewed by the congregation than were those images located near the high altar beyond the rood screen, an area reserved for the clergy and friars of Santa Maria Novella.

Finally, an additional possible representation of Birgitta of Sweden in the Dominican church in Florence may be found among Andrea di Bonaiuto da Firenze's series of frescoes in the church's chapter house, also known as the Spanish Chapel.[19] This room had a dual function: it was the funerary chapel of the patron and his wife, who are buried there; and it was a chapter house for the Dominican friars of Santa Maria Novella.[20] The fresco decoration was paid for by the Florentine merchant Buonamico di Lapo Guidalotti, a friend of Fra Jacopo Passavanti (1300–57), the Dominican writer and preacher who is sometimes ascribed overall responsibility for the iconographic program of the frescoes. Passavanti was prior of Santa Maria Novella from 1354 to 1355 and the author of an influential devotional treatise, *Lo specchio della vera penitenza* ("The Mirror of True Repentance").[21]

The central theme of the series of frescoes is twofold: first, commemoration of Christ's Crucifixion and subsequent Resurrection and Ascension to heaven; second, glorification of the Dominican Order, marking its key activities, and celebrating Dominican saints, such as Thomas Aquinas and Peter the Martyr. Accordingly, one of the entrance walls has scenes from the *Life of Saint Peter the Martyr*, and on the opposite wall the *Road to Calvary*, the *Crucifixion*, and the *Descent into Limbo*. Within the chapter house, the *Triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas* appears on the left, and the *Church Militant* and the *Church Triumphant*, known together as the *Via Veritatis*, are on the right. Scenes of the

19 On this artist, see Luisa Marcucci, "Andrea di Bonaiuto," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: 1961), vol. 3: 83–85.

20 On Andrea di Bonaiuto's *Via Veritatis* murals in the Spanish Chapel of Santa Maria Novella (1365–67), see Eve Borsook, *The Mural Painters of Tuscany: From Cimabue to Andrea del Sarto* (Oxford: 1980), 51–55; Julian Gardner, "Andrea di Bonaiuto and the Chapter House Frescoes in Santa Maria Novella," *Art History* 2 (1979): 107–38; Joseph Polzer, "Andrea di Bonaiuto's 'Via Veritatis' and Dominican Thought in Late Medieval Italy," *Art Bulletin* 77 (1995): 262–89; Serena Romano, "Due affreschi del Cappellone degli Spagnoli: problemi iconologici," *Storia dell'Arte* 28 (1976): 181–213.

21 For a recent study on Passavanti and other Dominican preachers, see Eliana Corbari, *Vernacular Theology: Dominican Sermons and Audience in Late Medieval Italy* (Berlin: 2013).

Pentecost, the *Navicella*, the *Resurrection*, and the *Ascension* decorate the vault.[22] The most celebrated image in the cycle is the *Via Veritatis.* In the lower part of this fresco, black-and-white dogs, the *domini canes*, race to the right, urged on by the order's founder, St Dominic, who represents the zeal of the Inquisition. Also in the lower portion of the fresco, St Peter the Martyr stands among twelve heretics, counting off their errors, point by point, on his fingers. And on the left side of the lower portion, where the *Church Militant* is depicted, are found, raised on platform, the representatives of power: the pope, a cardinal, a bishop, the emperor, a king, and a duke. Below them are two groups: the religious/clergy to the left and the laity to the right (Fig. 8.4). Some scholars, Anthony Luttrell in particular, have suggested that many of the figures in the fresco represent leading figures in contemporary Roman and Florentine



FIGURE 8.4 Andrea da Firenze, *Via Veritatis* (*detail*). Spanish Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence. Date: 1370.
PHOTO: ASAP CREATIVE/© 2006 TOPFOTO/ALINARI

22 Diana Norman, "The Art of Knowledge: Two Artistic Schemes in Florence," in *Siena, Florence and Padua: Art, Society and Religion 1280–1400*, ed. Diana Norman (New Haven: 1995), 217–42.

society. His argument is that this part of the *Via Veritatis* fresco is a kind of Renaissance photojournalistic record of a major ecclesiastical-imperial event of the period: the meeting in Rome of the pope and the emperor. Eve Borsook concurs: "It may be that this section of the mural alludes to the re-union of the Papacy and the Empire, which occurred in 1367 after a century of dissension."[23]

Scholars have differed in their identification of the major figures in the scene. Luttrell contends that the central figures represent the reigning pontiff, Urban V, with Emperor Charles IV, who was in Tuscany in 1368, to his left; but Serena Romano believes that the pope is Innocent VI.[24] Among the laity, we see a curious group of four women. Three of them are young: one, golden-haired and wearing a gold crown, is kneeling; the second is an elaborately dressed noblewoman; and the third is shabbily attired. The fourth woman is elderly and is wearing a white headdress. According to a local tradition, the four women represent, respectively, Dante's Beatrice, Boccaccio's Fiammetta, Petrarch's Laura, and the Blessed Villana delle Botti. In a footnote, Luttrell raises the possibility that the veiled figure wearing a habit is Birgitta of Sweden, who was in Rome in 1368, urging Urban V to remain in the city.[25] And thus Luttrell posits four alternative identities for the four women: the kneeling figure is Queen Johanna of Naples; the beautiful young woman shabbily dressed as a pilgrim and the aged widow are daughter and mother, respectively, Katarina Ulfsdotter and Birgitta; and the fourth figure is Lapa Buondelmonte Acciaiuoli, friend to both Birgitta's household and Queen Johanna.[26] Whether or not this identification is correct, it is interesting to note that the woman dressed in a nun's habit is conspicuously present in the group of the laity and not among the religious on the opposite side of the scene. If this woman is indeed Birgitta, it is no surprise to find her among the laypeople, since she herself never professed monastic vows.[27]

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23 See Borsook, *The Mural Painters*, 55.

24 See Anthony Luttrell, "A Hospitaller in a Florentine Fresco 1366/1388," *Burlington Magazine* 1 (1972): 362–66; and Romano, "Due affreschi," 201–2.

25 See Luttrell, "A Hospitaller," n. 15. We have no conclusive evidence for the identification of this group.

26 On the connections between Birgitta and Johanna of Naples, see Bridget Morris, "Birgitta of Sweden and Giovanna of Naples: An Unlikely Friendship?" in *Santa Brigida: Napoli, L'Italia. Atti del convegno di studi italo-svedese, Santa Maria Capua Vetere, 10–11 maggio 2006*, eds. Olle Ferm, Alessandra Perriccioli Saggese, and Marcello Rotili (Naples: 2009), 23–33; Elizabeth Casteen, *From She-Wolf to Martyr: The Reign and Disputed Reputation of Johanna I of Naples* (Ithaca, N.Y.: 2015), Ch. 4.

27 Remarking on the placement of this particular figure, Serena Romano suggests that she exemplifies a member of the third order, i.e. the lay order, who had not taken vows and lived under the rule. See Romano, "Due affreschi," 205–7.

The presence of so many images depicting St Birgitta of Sweden in a Dominican context might be explained by the activities of a network of Dominican Observants (*Osservanza*) and lay supporters who were working together to promote Birgitta's cult and secure the development of the Paradiso, the Birgittine monastic house in Florence founded in the 1390s. This network included, among others, the Alberti family, who had donated the property and the building to the Swedish Birgittines; the lawyer of the Florentine hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, Ser Lapo Mazzei; the Pratese merchant Francesco Datini; the preacher and Observant leader Giovanni Dominici; and the Dominican prioress Chiara Gambacorta of Pisa.[28] The Dominicans' veneration of Birgitta was an attempt to raise their order's own prestige and importance in the face of a growing popularity of the Franciscan Order, and, toward that end, the Dominicans endeavored to appropriate Birgitta and the Birgittine Order to further their goals. As the main supporters and followers of St Birgitta, they hoped to strengthen the status of the Dominican Order through their fervent dedication to the growing cult of St Birgitta.

Ann M. Roberts discusses the link between the patronage of the Dominican prioress Chiara Gambacorta and the artworks depicting St Birgitta and her visions that were commissioned for the San Domenico convent in Pisa in the early 15th century. Roberts highlights the devotion of the Dominican Observants to the saint, in particular the efforts of the prioress to establish the Birgittine cult in Pisa.[29] Chiara Gambacorta knew Birgitta's confessor and the chief promoter of her cult, Alfonso of Jaén, and she herself commissioned sermons and works of art in the saint's honor. Giovanni Dominici, the leader and spiritual mentor of the group of Birgittine supporters, and the most dominant member of the community of Santa Maria Novella at the time, was very close to Gambacorta. The latter had expressed her admiration for his sermons, and there were ongoing contacts between Corpus Domini, a convent Dominici had founded in Venice, and the Pisan convent of San Domenico.[30] Dominici

28 On the connections between the members of this group, see Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, *Renaissance Florence in the Rhetoric of Two Popular Preachers: Giovanni Dominici (1356–1419) and Bernardino da Siena (1380–1444)* (Turnhout: 2001), 197–202; Roberto Rusconi, *L'attesa della fine: Crisi della società, profezia ed Apocalisse in Italia al tempo del grande scisma d'Occidente (1378–1417)* (Rome: 1979), 101–11.

29 See Ann M. Roberts, "Chiara Gambacorta of Pisa as Patroness of the Arts," in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy*, eds. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley (Philadelphia: 1994).

30 On Dominici's connections with Chiara Gambacorta, see Niccola Zucchelli, *La Beata Chiara Gambacorta: La Chiesa ed il Convento di San Domenico in Pisa* (Pisa: 1914); Rusconi, *L'attesa della fine*, 104–5.

was also a friend of Francesco Datini's, whom he served as a spiritual advisor, and of Datini's confidant Lapo Mazzei, both of whom were a part of the circle promoting Birgitta. Dominici is often mentioned in Datini and Mazzei's correspondence, and both men admired his sermons.[31] Bartolomea degli Alberti, the widow of Antonio degli Alberti, who had donated the Paradiso to the Birgittines in 1392, completed this circle. Dominici considered Bartolomea his spiritual daughter and dedicated three of his treatises to her.[32] He was directly involved with the community of Paradiso, where he was active in the institutional organization of the convent, and he worked together with Datini to establish its reputation.[33]

Birgitta was venerated by the members of this circle, and their correspondence contains many examples of their admiration for the saint. Mazzei wrote about the Paradiso and about other Birgittine monasteries founded throughout Europe. He called the Swedish visionary "Santa Brisida," and in his letters he especially stressed her prophecies and her *Revelations*, and he spoke of her as "that ambassador that Christ has sent us."[34] In a particularly interesting letter Mazzei wrote to Datini about Dominici's preaching in Florence, he drew a direct parallel between the Dominican Observant preacher and St Birgitta:

> I tell you that I have never heard such a sermon nor was one like it ever preached before. It is certain that the friends of God are beginning to rise to extinguish the life of lazy clergymen and laymen. He will preach here at Lent and he is coming from Venice, where everyone was behind him. You'll think that you are hearing a disciple of Saint Francis reborn again. And we all either wept or stood stupefied by the clear truth he showed us, the same way as Saint Birgitta does.[35]

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31 On Dominici, Datini, and Mazzei, see Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato* (London: 1957).

32 On Dominici and Bartolomea degli Alberti, see Debby, *Renaissance Florence*, 26–27.

33 On Dominici's involvement with Francesco Datini and their close relationships with the Birgittines of the Paradiso, see Roberto Piattoli, "Due Lettere inedite di Francesco Datini da Prato a Giovanni Dominici," *Memorie Domenicane,* 51 (1934): 95–103. See also Giovanni Da Prato, *Il Paradiso degli Alberti. Ritrovi e ragionamenti del 1389*, ed. Alessandro Wesselofsky (Bologna: 1867), vol. 1: 1, 91–92, 144, 212; vol. 2: 2, 11.

34 See Lapo Mazzei, *Lettere di un notaro ad un mercante del secolo XIV*, ed. Cesare Guasti (Florence: 1880), vol. 1: 118: "quello ambassadore che Christo ci manda."

35 Mazzei, *Lettere di un notaro*, vol. 1: 227–28: "E dicovi che sì fatto sermone non udi' mai, nè si fatta predica. E di certo gli amici di Dio pare ricomincino a montar su, a ispegnere questa vita de' poltroni cherici e laici. E dee predicar qui la quaresima; e viene da Vinegia, che tutto 'l mondo gli andava drieto. Pensate vi parrà udire uno de' discepoli di san Francesco e rinascere. Tutti o piagnavamo o stavamo stupefatti alla chiara verità che mostra altrui, come fa santa Brisida."

Dominici's treatises were strongly influenced by St Birgitta and her visions. He was very interested in Christ as a child, and the theme of the Nativity appears prominently in his writings through three different media: poems, sermons, and letters. He frequently alluded to the painless birth of Christ and to the scenes of the adoration of the Christ Child, echoing elements in the Birgittine conception of the Nativity, and following the emotional conception derived from the mystical writings of St Bernard. Yet it was only with the Birgittine Nativity that there was an emphasis on the pain-free birth process and the motif of devotion. Dominici's most noted poem was a *laude* dedicated to the Nativity, considered by some to be the most important religious poem of the 15th century:

> Sweet Mary, say, how great was thy delight
> In gazing on thy son, on Christ, my Lord
> I can imagine that first scene: the Child
> A child who at his birth brought grace not pain
> Is loved, then lifted by his mother's hands
> So tenderly, to nestle in the crib,
> Where in his few, thin, swaddling clothes he lies
> Warmed by the joy, I sense, that lights thy face.
> How much thy joy was then, how much delight
> Was thine, when he was close within those arms!
> May I some gift of understanding share,
> And know, sweet Mary, thy content as mine,
> When at the moment of a mother's kiss
> I hear thee whisper softly, "Oh my Son."[36]

This panegyric emphasizing the painless birth and illuminating the mother's ardent adoration of her child reflects the Birgittine vision. Regarding Dominici's interest in Birgitta's conception of the Nativity, it is interesting to note that the Pietro di Miniato fresco on the inside of the façade wall in Santa Maria Novella, with its unmistakable depiction of St Birgitta, dates from the very time that Dominici had returned to take up his position in the friary in

36 On this *laude* and its significance, see Benedetto Bruni, "Il Beato Giovanni Dominici autore delle più belle laude del Quattrocento," *Memorie Domenicane*, 19 (1956): 17–24; Benedetto Croce, *Poesia popolare e poesia d'arte* (Bari: 1952), 213: "Dí, Maria dolce, con quanto disìo / Miravi il tuo figliuol, Cristo mio Dio / Quando tu il partoristi senza / pena / La prima cosa, credo, che facesti / Tu l'adorasti, o di grazia piena / Poi sopra il fien nel presepio il ponesti; / Con pochi e pover panni lo involgesti, / Maravigliando e godendo, cred'io ...."

Florence. Whether or not he was responsible for the choice of the distinctly Birgittine Nativity iconography, and the inclusion of the Swedish saint, it is clear that the artworks depicting Birgitta and her visions that appeared in Florence were created during a period when there were intensive efforts to secure her canonization, confirm the indulgences granted to her order, and establish and strengthen the Birgittine monastery of Paradiso.

A fresco by Fra Angelico (1395–1455) from 1440 that adorns one of the private cells in the convent of the Dominican Observants, San Marco, serves as another Dominican example of a possible Birgittine Nativity/Adoration Florentine artwork. The convent is on the site of a 12th-century Vallombrosan monastery, which was later given to Sylvestrine monks. During the 15th century, the Sylvestrines were forced to leave, and the buildings were, in turn, offered to Observant Dominicans from the convent of San Domenico, Fiesole, who began rebuilding the monastery in 1437.[37] San Marco soon became the home of many celebrated Dominicans, including the painter Fra Angelico, the Archbishop of Florence Antonino Pierozzi (1389–1459), Fra Bartolomeo (1472–1517), and Fra Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98). The cells of the friars' dormitories were decorated by Fra Angelico in collaboration with others. The frescoes served not merely as means of instruction, still less as adornment, but as aids to contemplation and meditation. The brothers inhabiting the cells would have constantly before them a vivid yet chaste reminder of one of the events in the life of Christ.

In Cell No. 5, on the second floor, decorated between 1440 and 1441, there is a fresco (193 × 164 cm) of an Adoration of the Child–type Nativity scene. The human figures in the painting all kneel in front of the naked Christ Child, who is the source of the light that illuminates the scene, presumably rendered in the moment just after his birth; St Birgitta wrote that the emergence of the child was as if a great light had shone through Mary's body. Other details of the scene are also in accordance with her vision: Mary's hands are clasped and her head is bowed; and the angels and saints on the roof assume the same posture. In Fra Angelico's fresco, there is a cross on the infant's halo, which is not from Birgitta's revelation, nor is it common in Nativity scenes, but it is fully consistent with the liturgical, Eucharistic meaning of the event.

It has been suggested that the kneeling figure beside the Virgin holding her hands in a gesture of prayer is St Birgitta.[38] The saint looks toward the Virgin Mary and is diagonally parallel and opposite to Peter the Martyr. In the earliest paintings and illuminations showing Birgitta, the visionary was usually pictured as an elderly woman, but here the kneeling figure appears as a young and

37 On San Marco, see William Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco* (New Haven: 1993).

38 For the identification of the figure as St Birgitta, see Corbari, *Vernacular Theology.*

handsome crowned woman, comporting with contemporaneous Italian ideals of beauty: white skin, radiant eyes, red lips, and a high forehead. This beautiful saint may be another representation of St Birgitta from a Dominican setting. If so, the crown she wears can be explained through the identification of Birgitta as a Swedish princess, as stated in her *Vita*.[39]

2 St Birgitta and the Franciscan Artistic Tradition

The Tuscan Florentine Franciscan tradition sometimes draws iconographic and symbolic correlations between the figure of St Birgitta and Franciscan female saints, most prominently with St Clare of Assisi. Specific connections are found in 15th-century Nativity scenes as well as depictions of St Clare and St Birgitta in the role of saving sinking ships. A possible coupling of Birgitta and Clare can be found as early as in the 14th century, in an intriguing painting from Florence, *The Virgin of the Apocalypse with Saints and Angels*, by Giovanni del Biondo and dated to 1391, which includes a portrayal of Birgitta in profile, standing among a group of four female saints. This panel was commissioned for the funerary chapel of a member of the Third Order of the Franciscans, whose family coat of arms is visible on the shields presented in the lower portion of the image. The Virgin, depicted as a queen, stands on a raised platform in the center of the panel, with four male and four female saints to either side. To the Virgin's right are St Francis of Assisi, with radiating stigmata on his hands; St Lawrence, with a palm and a grill; St Anthony the Abbot, with a pilgrim's staff; and, finally, St Stephen, with a crusader's banner. To her left are St Clare of Assisi, with a lily; St Birgitta imaged as a beautiful, young noblewoman, with a burning heart in her hand; St Catherine of Alexandria, with a crown and a wheel; and St Mary Magdalene, covered in her long, blonde hair and kneeling in a penitential pose. The placement of St Birgitta next to St Clare is a precursor to what will be similarities in the iconography of portrayals the two saints in later works. However, the identification of the female figure as St Birgitta is problematic, as the burning heart was usually an attribute of St Clare of Montefalco (*c.* 1268–1308), a sign of her ardent belief. Consequently, the determination of this figure as Birgitta is highly speculative and illustrates

39 In the *Vita* of Birgitta, which circulated from the 1370s onwards, she is described as "the princess of Närke in the kingdom of Sweden" (*principissa Nericie*).

again the difficulties and the tricky nature of attempting to identifying her in Italian art.[40]

Another connection between the iconography of St Clare and St Birgitta can be found in Nativity images; in the Adoration of the Child iconography, St Clare is sometimes portrayed as a witness to the divine revelation, kneeling beside the Madonna in a posture of adoration—exactly as encountered in the earliest Birgitta images.[41] This representation of St Clare agrees with a vision described by the nuns during her canonization process: "on the night of the Lord's Nativity, she also saw the crib of our Lord Jesus Christ." The same episode is present in the Legend of Saint Clare and demonstrates how the Lord had pity upon the saint in her illness, and emphasizes that she was worthy of seeing the crib of the infant Jesus.[42] One visual example of this vision, from 1492 by an anonymous Italian painter, depicts St Clare kneeling in front of the Christ Child, radiant with light beside the Virgin and below St Francis. These representations of Clare of Assisi in Adoration scenes highlight her devotion, and the imagery is very similar to that of St Birgitta's Nativity visions; indeed, in 15th-century Italian art, St Clare is sometimes portrayed in place of St Birgitta as a witness to the adoration of the Child.[43]

Further possible parallels between St Clare and the narrative tradition of St Birgitta as it developed in Tuscan art can be found in Clare's role as the patroness of sailors and images depicting both women saving sinking ships. A mid-15th-century narrative predella panel by Giovanni di Paolo presents St Clare in her role as patroness of sailors, protecting a ship in a storm.[44] The saint descends from above, controlling the forces of nature. Holding the sail ropes with one hand, she uses the other to reassure the frightened sailors below. This episode, which does not appear in the early medieval sources relating to St Clare's life, is first recounted in Bartolomeo of Pisa's influential treatise of 1390,

40 The Giovanni del Biondo panel, entitled *The Virgin of the Apocalypse with Saints and Angels*, is dated to 1391 and found in the Pinacoteca of the Vatican. The information on this panel and its reproduction is taken from the Web Gallery of Art: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/g/giovanni/biondo/virgin_a.html.

41 See Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, *The Cult of St. Clare of Assisi in Early Modern Italy* (Farnham: 2014), 76–79.

42 Clare of Assisi, *The Lady: Clare of Assisi. Early Documents*, ed. and trans. Regis J. Armstrong (New York: 2006), 282–83, 212.

43 For a discussion of this image, see Debby, *The Cult of St. Clare of Assisi*, 76–77.

44 On Giovanni di Paolo, see John Pope-Hennessy, *Giovanni di Paolo* (London: 1937); John Pope-Hennessy, "Giovanni di Paolo," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (1988).

Liber de conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Jesu ("Book of the Correspondences of the Life of St Francis to the Life of Lord Jesus").[45]

Martino di Bartolomeo's 1405 altarpiece of the Virgin and Child, originally from the convent of San Domenico in Pisa and now in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, was commissioned by the Dominican prioress Chiara Gambacorta for her community and included five predella panels depicting scenes from St Birgitta's life and miracles: transcribing the words of an angel (the *Sermo angelicus*), rendering the words of Christ, witnessing the Nativity, speaking with a Swedish princess, and, most significant here, safeguarding a sinking ship. In this last scene, Birgitta appears in a cloud, and, raising her hands, saves the passengers and brings them safely to shore. Thus, both St Clare and St Birgitta prevented the sinking of ships: Clare rescued sailors and Birgitta rescued pilgrims, and both female saints subdued the sea. The connection with Pisa in both cases is significant; Pisa had a seagoing culture and was a major port of call for both sailors and pilgrims.

So far, this discussion has shown that while the Dominicans were trying to appropriate St Birgitta to their order and create a close contact between Dominican legacy and the saint, the Franciscans restricted themselves to creating only iconographic and symbolic connections between St Birgitta and St Clare of Assisi.

3 St Birgitta and the Birgittines in Florence

The initiative for the founding of the Birgittine monastery of Paradiso in Florence was first taken in 1392, when Antonio degli Alberti donated an estate to Birgitta's order, already established in Vadstena, Sweden.[46] Owing to the bishop of Florence's disapproval of the structure of the order, which included both a house for men and a house for women alongside each other in the same monastic complex, the establishment of the Birgittine Paradiso was impeded. Finally, on 3 December 1397, the Birgittines won approval from the Florentine Republic to establish the monastery, only to be forced to leave the premises a few years later, with the exile of their patron Antonio degli Alberti from

45 Bartolomeo of Pisa, *De conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Iesu* (Rome: 1906–12).

46 On the Birgittine Order and its monasteries, see Torvald Höjer, *Studier i Vadstena klosters och birgittinordens historia intill midten af 1400–talet* (Uppsala: 1905); Hans Cnattingius, *Studies in the Order of St. Bridget of Sweden* (Stockholm: 1963); Ulla Sander-Olsen, Tore Nyberg, and Per Sloth Carlsen (eds.), *Birgitta Atlas. Saint Birgitta's Monasteries. Die Klöster der Heiligen Birgitta* (Uden: 2013).

Florence and the confiscation of his property, including the land and buildings of the Paradiso. The monastery was re-established in 1401 and expanded significantly between 1404 and 1408, under the protection of the Florentine Republic and the Guelph Party, and it quickly became one of the principal houses of the Birgittine Order. In 1432, under the abbacy of Suor Tommasa di Filippo da Diacceto, there was a decision to construct a new monastery and chapel for the order within the city walls, alongside the Church of San Pier Gattolino, near the Boboli Gardens (laid out in the 16th century). The cornerstone of the new monastery, to be called Santa Maria del Popolo, was laid in 1435. It is interesting to note that the very first abbess of the Paradiso was a Franciscan nun, Maria dei Casali (a Poor Clare appointed by Boniface IX in 1395), and further that, in the 15th century, Birgittine nuns from the Paradiso were responsible for acquiring books for the Franciscan houses in Florence.[47]

There are surviving artworks connected with the Paradiso in Florence, often focusing on Birgitta in her role as foundress of the order. These works include a manuscript illustration by Lippo d'Andrea di Lippo that was formerly the frontispiece of a Birgittine prayer book written sometime after 1401 for the Paradiso convent. It depicts the *Annunciation* in an upper scene; and, in the lower scene, set in the nave of the church, St Birgitta, dressed in a dark gray habit with a white headdress and veil, holds a processional cross typical of the Birgittine convent of Santa Maria del Paradiso.[48] Next to her, chanting the Divine Office, are nine Birgittine nuns dressed in light gray habits with white-and-black veils and headpieces decorated with five red dots symbolizing Christ's wounds.

Additionally, a small devotional triptych from the Paradiso created by Paolo Uccello includes the depiction of a nun of the Birgittine Order at the foot of the cross.[49] An inscription identifies her as Sister Felicity, and the work was probably intended for her private devotions in her cell at the Birgittine convent of Santa Maria del Paradiso near Florence. There is a notice of a Felicità

47 On the Birgittine monastery in Florence, see Da Prato, *Il Paradiso*. See also Daniella Delcorno Branca, "*Il Giardino novella*. Lettere di direzione spiritual del Quattrocento trasmesse dale monache del Paradiso," in *Da Dante a Montale: Studi di filologia e critica letteraria in onore di Emilio Pasquini* (Bologna: 2005), 307–22; Cnattingius, *Studies in the Order of St. Bridget of Sweden*; Mina Gregori and G. Rocchi (eds.), *Il Paradiso in Pian di Ripoli* (Florence: 1985). On its artistic history, see Giuseppina Bacarelli, "Le commissioni artistiche attraverso i documenti," in *Il Paradiso in Pian di Ripoli*, eds. Mina Gregori and G. Rocchi (Florence: 1985), 96–103.

48 On this manuscript, see Laurence B. Kanter, *Paintings and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence 1300–1450* (New York: 1994), 319–20.

49 The Paolo Uccello panel entitled *The Crucifixion* is dated to 1450 and found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. A reproduction can be found at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paolo_uccello,_trittico_della_crocifissione,_metropolitan_museum.jpg.

di Francesco Casavecchia joining the order in January 1455 and the painting seems, in fact, to date from about that time. The central panel portrays the Virgin and John the Evangelist standing to either side of the crucified Christ, and Mary Magdalene kneeling between them, next to the diminutive figure identified as Sister Felicity, who is positioned in front of the Virgin. The upper sections of the lateral panels, in which the Annunciation is presented, include the angel and the Virgin of the Annunciation. The lower sections of the lateral panels depict Birgitta, on the left, and the Virgin holding the Christ Child, on the right.[50] Also, in two later paintings of the Virgin and Child by the Florentine master Ansano Ciampanti dated to the early 16th century and now held in the Musée du Petit Palais in Avignon, St Birgitta appears in a black-and-white headdress holding a book and a red processional cross characteristic of the Paradiso.[51]

There are additional manuscripts connected with the Paradiso that include portrayals of St Birgitta. It is significant that Birgitta's *Revelations* were translated into the Italian vernacular, and manuscripts containing all or parts of the text can be found in the Tuscan archives. For example, Carl Nordenfalk mentions a manuscript in the Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati in Siena that contains an Italian translation of the *Revelations* and the *Sermo angelicus*, written in 1399 at the command of the Sienese cleric Ser Christofano di Gano Guidini, who was also a friend of St Catherine of Siena.[52] It features a miniature representing St Birgitta in the act of writing her *Revelations* as well as several historiated initials depicting the saint. The illustrator seems to have been a Sienese follower of Lippo Vanni, and these illuminations are some of the earliest depictions of the saint.

Another example offering representations of St Birgitta in manuscripts of her writings that enjoyed popularity in Italian circles is a copy of the *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges* in Italian, now in the University Library of Oslo. The illustrations in this manuscript appear to be of Florentine workmanship.

50 On this panel see Keith Christiansen, "Recent Acquisitions: A Selection 1996–1997," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 55, no. 2 (1997): 26. Christiansen attributes it to Paolo Uccello and believes that it was probably painted in the mid-1430s, possibly for the convent of Santa Maria del Paradiso near Florence. He identifies St Birgitta on the left wing and the Virgin and Child on the right; he notes the inscription identifying the small Birgittine nun kneeling in the Crucifixion as Suor Felicità.

51 Michel Laclotte and Esther Moench (eds.), *Peinture italienne: Musée du Petit Palais Avignon* (Paris: 2005), 53.

52 Siena, Biblioteca comunale degli Intronati, I.V.25/26. On this manuscript, see Nordenfalk, "Saint Birgitta of Sweden," 380–82. See also Chapter 7 by Maria H. Oen in the present volume.

Two further Italian manuscripts that include representations of St Birgitta are a copy of the *Revelations* in the Ambrosian Library at Milan and another prayer book originally in the Benedictine Abbey of Murate at Florence.[53] Eliana Corbari has pointed out that many Dominican texts written by important preachers of the Dominican Order, such as Jacobus de Voragine (1228–98), Giordano da Pisa (1260–1311), and Jacopo Passavanti, had a Birgittine provenance. These manuscripts, which were owned and copied by women associated with the Birgittine Paradiso monastery, offer yet another testimony to the Dominican-Birgittine alliance in piety.[54]

In the late 15th/early 16th century, a laywoman and supporter of the Dominican Order, Domenica da Paradiso, found a model for imitation in Birgitta of Sweden, and her use of this model serves as evidence of the enduring importance Birgitta had for Dominicans. Domenica had spent some time in the convent of Paradiso between 1495 and 1497.[55] Born Domenica Narducci in the suburb of the Paradiso in Florence, she became known for her great piety and served as a spiritual advisor to the Medici family. She was inspired by Girolamo Savonarola, and she enjoyed an exceptional status as a preacher within her community of nuns and as a famous reformer of the female branch of the Dominican Order; in 1515 she founded the convent of Santa Crocetta in Florence. In her later years, Domenica was a major figure in Italian religious life and is known to have exchanged letters with popes Clement VII and Paul III. Many of Domenica's extant writings can be found in the Archivio di Monastero della Crocetta in Florence, including the "Epistolary" (thirty letters written between 1506 and 1548), "Sermons" (some twenty works, written between 1507 and 1545), "Dialogue" (1503), "The Vision of the Tabernacle" (1508), "Revelations and Visions" (1507–45), and several spiritual treatises.

Domenica employed the monastic custom of *lectio divina*, a reading of and listening to Scripture, meditating on its significance, and praying for a contemplative encounter with God. Her mystical and visionary experiences informed and lent authority to her interpretations of Scripture.[56] Three female saints

53 Nordenfalk, "Saint Birgitta of Sweden," 382–83.

54 See Corbari, *Vernacular Theology*, 125–50. For a meticulous study of the manuscripts from the Birgittine convent in Florence, see Rosanna Miriello, *I manoscritti del monastero del Paradiso di Firenze* (Florence: 2007).

55 On Domenica da Paradiso and her connection with Birgitta, see Domenica da Paradiso, *I sermoni di Domenica da Paradiso*, eds. Rita Librandi and Adriana Valerio (Florence: 1999), 127–41. See also Giancarlo Alfano, "Brigida cinge l'Europa: Una stampa romana e la politica religiosa di metà Cinquecento," in Ferm, Perriccioli Saggese, and Rotili, *Santa Brigida: Napoli, L'Italia*, 171–89.

56 See Adriana Valerio, "Domenica da Paradiso," in *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Merion Ann Taylor (Grand Rapids, Mich.: 2012), 383–86.

in particular served as Domenica's inspiration in her sermons: Mary Magdalene, Catherine of Siena, and Birgitta of Sweden. With Birgitta, she also found someone she could emulate in the role of apostle and reformer of the Church. In 1533, Domenica addressed a sermon celebrating St Birgitta to Caterina Cibo (1501–57), the duchess of Camerino, who was active in the reform circles in Italy. In this sermon, Domenica described Birgitta as a role model and a spiritual guide for her prophetic and pastoral activities. Like Savonarola, Domenica emphasized that Birgitta was a gifted prophet. It is noteworthy that the saint remained a source of inspiration for such a prominent female leader as Domenica da Paradiso, illustrating the continuation of the Dominican devotion to her cult in later periods.[57]

In conclusion, it appears that in the Dominican context the Nativity scene including St Birgitta was very important, while in the Franciscan context St Birgitta is usually associated with St Clare, thus contributing to variations in the St Clare iconography. And in the Birgittine context of the Paradiso, images of Birgitta refer primarily to her role as a foundress of an order.

One final example, a 1522 altarpiece by Giovanni Antonio Sogliani (1492–1544) featuring St Birgitta, helps to further highlight the Dominican, Franciscan, and Birgittine connections. The work is found in the great refectory of San Marco in Florence, today a museum that includes a collection of works by the School of San Marco, that is, by students of Fra Bartolomeo, a Dominican friar and follower of Savonarola who specialized in religious paintings. Sogliani is one of the most prominent artists on display here,[58] and his altarpiece was originally in the Birgittine monastery Paradiso in Florence.[59] This painting presently faces another Sogliani painting, depicting St Clare and St Francis. Thus, there is a work dedicated to St Birgitta and one dedicated to St Clare in the refectory of the Dominican house, illustrating the close associations between the three orders in Florence. The subject of the altarpiece is St Birgitta consigning the rule to the Birgittine sisters and brothers. Birgitta, dressed in a brown gown, stands in the center of this group, giving the rule to four nuns garbed in gray and with characteristic Birgittine headgear, and, on the other side, to four monks wearing gray gowns decorated with red crosses on the

57 See Alfano, "Birgida cinge l'Europa," 170–72; Librandi and Valerio, *I Sermoni*, 127–41: Sermone IX: 24 agosto 1533.

58 On Giovanni Antonio Sogliani, see Vincenzo Abbate, *Giovanni Antonio Sogliani (1492–1544)* (Milan: 2009); Louis Alexander Waldman, "Giovanni Antonio Sogliani and His Patrons: The Albizi, Bernardi, and Serristori Altarpieces," *Paragone* 59 (2008): 69–86.

59 This painting was in the Paradiso until 1734, when it was transferred to various museums and religious institutions in Florence; it came to the collection of San Marco in 1967.

sleeves. The upper part of the painting portrays Christ and Mary and an angel, from whom Birgitta receives the rule. Notably, Birgitta is depicted larger than all the other figures, and her centrality makes clear that she is the main protagonist of the image (Fig. 8.5).

This painting may be compared with a somewhat similar scene in which St Clare of Assisi receives the rule for the Clarissan nuns. It is part of an altarpiece painted by the Neapolitan Niccolò Colantonio (1420–60), now in the Museo di Capodimonte di Napoli, which features St Francis on a gold background delivering the Franciscan rule to both a group of sisters on his left, headed by St Clare, and a group of brothers on his right, led by Fra Leo. The emphasis in this painting is on St Francis's authority as he delivers the orders,



FIGURE 8.5 Giovanni Antonio Sogliani, *St. Birgitta.* San Marco, Florence. Date: 1522.
PHOTO: ASAP CREATIVE/AKG-IMAGES/RABATTI & DOMINGIE

and on the centrality of St Clare as the leader of a community of nuns.[60] When comparing the Sogliani painting of Birgitta with this work, there is a striking difference between the roles of St Birgitta and St Clare: the latter receives her rule from St Francis, whereas the former receives hers directly from heaven.

When examining the reception of St Birgitta of Sweden in the Dominican, Franciscan, and Birgittine circles in Florence, it is worth highlighting the co-operation and exchange between the orders, and their joint efforts toward attempting to secure her cult. Sogliani's altarpiece with Birgitta receiving the rule serves as a case in point. It was originally painted for the Birgittine house of the Paradiso, it is currently located in the Dominican convent of San Marco, and its iconography is strongly connected with the Franciscan traditions of St Clare. This intimate connection between the orders centering on the figure of St Birgitta is further manifested in the writing and activities of Domenica da Paradiso, who was originally from the Birgittine house of the Paradiso, but then became an ardent supporter of the Dominicans, while, in her spiritual treatises, appears to have been inspired by Franciscan spirituality. Thus, even though rivalry and competition typified the relations between the orders, in the case of the cult of St Birgitta in Florence there was a common admiration of the Swedish saint.

There are many portrayals of St Birgitta of Sweden in Florentine art related to her biography, her visions, and her miracles. Most commonly she was depicted as an elderly nun and often in the context of her Nativity vision. She was portrayed as a prophet, and she served as a role model for both friars and nuns. For some works the focus is on her role in founding a religious order, while for others it is her role in providing the rule to her disciples. St Birgitta's cult was encouraged by the Dominicans and the Franciscans as well as by the local Birgittine community. It is often difficult to identify Birgitta or Birgittine iconography, as she has unusual attributes and is often confused with St Clare as well as with other female saints. Interestingly, there are no references in Tuscan culture to her Swedish origins or to her early history, and she is depicted as a local Italian saint. Birgitta endured in art and writing in Tuscany beyond her lifetime and well into the 15th and 16th centuries, a measure of her importance in Tuscan culture.

60 Mario Alberto Pavona, *Iconologia Francescana: Il Quattrocento* (Todi: 1988), 72, ill. 31. On the Franciscan- Birgittine connections regarding the artistic production of manuscripts, see Roberto Piattoli, "Un capitolo di storia dell'arte libraria ai primi del Quattrocento: rapporti tra il monastero fiorentino del Paradiso e l'ordine francescano," *Studi francescani* 3 (1932): 1–21.

CHAPTER 9

The *Revelations* of St Birgitta in the Holy Roman Empire

Pavlína Rychterová

The early reception of Birgitta of Sweden's *Revelations* in the Holy Roman Empire, then with its center in the Kingdom of Bohemia, overlaps with the initial efforts to have the visionary canonized at the end of the 1370s. In a letter from Emperor Charles IV to Pope Gregory XI, dated to 9 September 1377, the emperor endorses Birgitta's canonization.[1] The letter is sent from Tangermünde, where the emperor held talks with the envoys of Pope Gregory XI.[2] Charles's letter of support characterizes Birgitta's *fama sanctitatis* without mentioning her revelations. We may thus assume that the emperor did not know of Birgitta's revelations as it is likely that he would have mentioned them in his letter had he known of them. The emperor's active interest in church reform and in the improvement of religious life is well documented, and so is his contact with various German female visionaries. This means, perhaps, that the pope's envoys who, in Tangermünde, probably asked Charles to support Birgitta's canonization (one of the envoys was Galeardus, bishop of Spoleto, later a witness in the canonization process), did not present the *Revelations* as an evidence of her holiness. It is therefore worth asking if the *Revelations* were ready to be presented publicly at this time, and if Birgitta, at this point, was regarded as an influential visionary by people outside the circle of her supporters. The sources that speak about Birgitta's considerable political influence during her life all originate from the time after 1377, and the *Revelations* became widely known only after they were published by Alfonso of Jaén in 1378. Roughly during the same time, after the outbreak of the papal schism, the *Revelations* played a key role in the pro-Urbanist propaganda. The emperor sent an embassy to the Curia from Tangermünde. One of the ambassadors was Eckehard Dersch, bishop of Worms, who very probably brought a copy of the *Revelations* back to Prague. This copy may very well be MS 3310 of the National Library in Warsaw—one of the three oldest extant, richly illuminated,

1 AP, 53–54.

2 František Kavka, *Vláda Karla IV. za jeho císařství (1355–1378). Země České koruny, rodová říšská a evropská politika. II. Díl (1364–1478)* (Prague: 1993), 207.

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manuscripts containing Birgitta's *Revelations*, all of which are dated to *c.* 1377–81 and attributed to the same scriptorium in Naples.[3] The Warsaw manuscript may be two years older than the others, as it is the only one of the three to contain Alfonso's first redaction of the *Revelations*, dated to 1377–78.[4] Charles IV's son, Václav IV (d. 1419), may have inherited the copy brought from Rome. The *Revelations* were reportedly his favorite reading, together with the Bible, as we learn from a marginal note in a copy of Birgitta's work dated 1392, and most likely made in Prague.[5]

We know more about the reception of Birgitta's *Revelations* at the University of Prague. The Master of the University of Prague, theologian Matthew of Cracow, was appointed by Pope Urban VI as a member of Birgitta's canonization commission in 1379.[6] The visionary's writings were attractive to Matthew for several reasons. At first, Birgitta probably held a very important position in his personal piety. In the two long-term centers of his activity, Prague and Heidelberg, altar consecrations to Birgitta of Sweden (both stemming from after her canonization in 1391) can be connected to Matthew of Cracow.[7] The critical and reformist stances formulated in Birgitta's texts were in line with his own efforts to raise the moral and educational standards of the clergy and of pastoral care. Matthew shared these ideas with other Prague-based

3 Warszawa, Biblioteka Narodowa, 3310. See Joan Isobel Friedman, "MS Cotton Claudius B.I.: A Middle English Edition of St Bridget of Sweden's Liber Celestis," in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late Medieval England*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge, U.K.: 1996), 95. For the three manuscripts, see Hans Aili and Jan Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae: The Earliest Illuminated Manuscripts and Panel Paintings Related to the Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, 2 vols (Stockholm: 2003), and Chapter 7 by Maria H. Oen in the present volume.

4 On the first compilation and redactions of the *Revelations*, see Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, "General Introduction," in Rev. I, pp. 1–37, here at 13–26. The other two MSS are: New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M.498, and Palermo, Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana, IV.G.2.

5 Praha, Knihovna Metropolitní kapituly, C 87 (single leaf): "Hunc librum Rex Wenceslaus pre aliis legebat et bibliam" [This book the king Wenceslas preferred to read besides the Scripture]. See Pavlína Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen der heiligen Birgitta von Schweden. Eine Untersuchung zur alttschechischen Übersetzung des Thomas von Štítné* (Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgeschichte) 58 (Cologne: 2004), 85–86. On the imperial engagement in the promotion of the Swedish saint, see Pavlína Rychterová, "The Reception of the *Revelationes* of St. Birgitta of Sweden in Late Medieval Bohemia," in *Des lectures salutaires pour tous. Les textes religieux les plus populaires au Moyen Âge, publics et modes de diffusion / Every (Wo)Man's Books of Salvation: The Most Popular Medieval Religious Texts in Europe, Their Circulation and Reception*, ed. Florence Bourgne and Geraldine Veysseyre (Turnhout: [forthcoming]).

6 Matthias Nuding, *Matthäus von Krakau. Theologe, Politiker, Kirchenreformer in Krakau, Prag und Heidelberg zur Zeit des Großen abendländischen Schismas* (Spätmittelalter und Reformation. Neue Reihe) 38 (Tübingen 2007), 302–12.

7 Nuding, *Matthäus*, 209–10.

theologians, all members of a circle of reformist church intellectuals around the charismatic archbishop of Prague, John of Jenstein.[8] John and his circle were ardent supporters of Urban VI, wherefore Matthew of Cracow undoubtedly was interested in the *Revelations* also for political reasons.[9] Several works of pro-Urbanistic propaganda are extant in manuscripts of Bohemian origin, for example *Tractatus de assuntione Urbani pape VI*, written by Birgitta's collaborator and editor Alfonso of Jaén, who was one of the leading propagandists of the Roman papacy.[10] After having participated in the first papal commission evaluating the case for Birgitta's sanctity, appointed by Urban VI in Rome, Matthew of Cracow stayed again at the pope's court, which then sojourned in Genoa, in 1385–86. It was here that he wrote, and probably also delivered, his *Proposicio super canonisacione beate Brigide*, with copious quotations from the *Revelations*, which attests to Matthew's familiarity with the entire corpus.[11]

Matthew of Cracow based his *Proposicio* on an interpretation of a verse of the Revelation of John (22:11), *sanctum sanctificetur*. He characterized Birgitta as "bearing Christ's stigmata"[12] and emphasized her position as mediatrix between the Redeemer and the contemporary world, which has forgotten Christ's

8 Ruben Ernst Weltsch, *Archbishop John of Jenstein (1348–1400): Papalism, Humanism and Reform in Pre-Hussite Prague* (Mouton: 1968).

9 Many of Birgitta's visions, as well as the acts of the process of canonization, characterized Birgitta as an interpreter of God's desire for the pope's return to Rome. After the outbreak of the Great Schism, her person and the work were employed as an important argument in the pro-Urbanist propaganda, see Arne Jönsson (ed.), *Alfonso of Jaén. His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi* (Lund: 1989).

10 Several works of pro-Urbanistic propaganda are extant in manuscripts of Bohemian origin, such as Alfonso of Jaén's *Tractatus de assuntione Urbani pape VI*. See Praha, Národní knihovna České republiky, VIII D 15, fols 21b–26b; Olivier Marin, *L'archevêque, le maître et le dévot. Genèses du mouvement réformateur pragois. Années 1360–1419* (Études d'histoire médiévale) 9 (Paris: 2005), 552. The text may have been brought to Prague by the master general of the Dominicans and confessor of Catherine of Siena, Raymond of Capua.

11 Matthaeus de Cracovia, *Tractatus Birgittini—Brigitinské traktáty*, ed. Drahomíra Breedveld-Baránková (Fontes Latini Bohemorum) 7 (Prague: 2008).

12 Matthaeus de Cracovia, *Tractatus*, 8: "Fuit eciam sancta quasi sanguine tacta vel tincta, crucem videlicet Cristi tollendo cottidie et stigmata eius tam in corpore quam corde ferendo" ("[Birgitta] was a saint also in the sense that she was touched or speckled with blood. She took daily Christ's cross and bore his stigmata on her body and in her heart"). Matthew's characterization of Birgitta within the meaning *imitatio Christi* differs from her characteristics in *Revelations* and in her legends, where *imitatio Mariae* is dominant, see Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: 2001), 98–99; Matthaeus de Cracovia, *Tractatus*, IX–XI.

suffering.[13] Matthew regarded the reform of Christianity along the lines of *imitatio Christi* as a central task for pastoral care.[14] Following Christ in his suffering was, evidently, an important part of his personal spirituality. For Matthew, the most significant vision of Birgitta was the one in the last chapter of the seventh book (Rev. VII: 30), in which Christ threatens with his wrath those who ignore his sufferings as a Son of Man.[15] According to Matthew, it is this vision that gives sense to the remainder of the corpus, being its unquestioned culmination and the key to the interpretation of the rest of the *Revelations*.

This exceptional role that Matthew ascribed to the vision in the last chapter of Book VII explains the origin of the so-called Prague redaction of the *Revelations*, which is transmitted in a group of manuscripts of largely Prague provenience. These manuscripts, in a sense, offer an independent version of the *Revelations*, which probably was produced shortly after Alfonso of Jaén's second redaction of the corpus, when he added an eighth book, the *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges*, to the existing seven books.[16] The main difference between the Prague redaction and Alfonso's second redaction lies in a changed order of the books: the *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges*, together with the preface by Alfonso of Jaén, *Epistola solitarii ad reges*, is situated between Books II and III in the copies of the Prague redaction. Carl-Gustaf Undhagen ascribed the authorship of the Prague redaction of the *Revelations* to Matthew of Cracow,

13 Matthaeus de Cracovia, *Tractatus*, 14–16: "Siquidem a decimo etatis sue anno postquam ei in persona durissime flagellanti apparuerat dicens: 'Ecce sic plagatus sum!' Et illa: 'Domine, quis fecit hoc?' ac ille: 'Qui mecontempnunt,' ab illo, inquam, die sic fuit ei memoria passionis et crucis Cristi impressa, ut frequentissime memoraretur illius passionis sanctissime et raro sine lacrimis conabaturque omnes ad passionis Cristi memoriam et amorem inducere" ("As she was ten years old [the Lord] appeared in the figure of a person severely whipped and said: 'Look how I am wounded!' and she [said]: 'Who did it, my Lord?' And him: 'Those who condemn me.' From this day, I say, the thought of Christ's cross and his passion was engraved in her memory so that she reminded herself all the time of His most holy passion, very rarely without tears and strove to beacon everybody to the love of Christ and to the memory of his passion").

14 Nuding, *Matthäus*, 33–41; Marin, *L'archevêque*, 555–57.

15 Matthaeus de Cracovia, *Tractatus*, 16: "Summeque deplanxit [Birgitta] et descripsit ingratitudinem hominum in omni statu, quod videlicet non attendunt ad ea, que Cristus sustinuit et fecit in carne, sed portant onus dyaboli cum suavitate fallaci. Et illam revelacionem quasi summam tocius et conclusionem ultimam revelacioneum ex mandato Cristi posuit, ubi Dominus terribilem sentenciam ire sue conminatur, si homines in tali statu moriantur" ("With great sadness she narrated the ingratitude of the people of all estates, who bear the burden of the devil full of false delights and neglect what Christ suffered and did in flesh. According to the order of Christ she set this revelation, in which the Lord threatens people if they die in such a condition with the judgement of his wrath, as the summary and conclusion of all her revelations").

16 See Undhagen, "General Introduction," in Rev. I, pp. 13–26.

but why the order of the books had been changed remained unclear to him and also in the subsequent research.[17] We may assume that Matthew wanted to preserve the position of the key vision in the last chapter of the seventh book; it was to be a closing message about Christ's second coming modelled on the Revelation of St John.

The reformist work of John of Jenstein and his circle, and the nature of the reception of Birgitta's *Revelations*, described above, culminated in the early 1390s, when an extensive medieval Czech translation of the *Revelations* was made, but it rapidly petered out. Entangled in a conflict with the king, Wenceslas IV, John of Jenstein was compelled to resign his office, and he died in Rome in 1400. In 1395 Matthew of Cracow accepted an offer of a professorship at Heidelberg, and he died in 1410 as bishop of Worms.[18] The opinions of Jenstein's circle of intellectuals on religious education of the laity through Eucharistic piety and their specific reception of Birgitta's *Revelations* met with a remarkable response in the work of John of Marienwerder, who left Prague in 1386 and received the office of canon in the Marienwerder chapter as a priest of the Teutonic order.[19] He devoted the rest of his life to caring for his famous spiritual daughter Dorothy of Montau and to working for her canonization.[20] The inspiration drawn by this mystic from the visions of Birgitta of Sweden is well documented. The styling of her *fama sanctitatis*, as conceived by John of Marienwerder, also has some distinctive Birgittine traits. An addendum to the Birgittine model, and, obviously, an importation from Prague, is the strong accent on Eucharistic piety, which constitutes one of the pillars of the spirituality of Dorothy of Montau. The efforts to have her canonized, which were supported by the Order of the Teutonic Knights, are the best example of the reception

17 Undhagen, "Special Introduction," in Rev. I, pp. 38–226, here 54–85.

18 It has not been determined yet whether and how a remarkable manuscript from 1410–11, kept today in Providence, Rhode Island (Brown University, German Codex 1), is related to the work of Matthew of Cracow at Heidelberg. It is a compilation of pastoral theological texts and prophecies written in the Swabian and north Frankish dialect. Apart from excerpts from the *Revelations* it contains a translation of *Dialogus rationis et conscientiae de crebra communione* by Matthew of Cracow, anonymous expositions of frequent Communion, translations of the Apocalypse, the *Visio Tundali* and the *Visio Fursei*, a translation of the *Epistel des Rabbi Samuel an Rabbi Isaac* by Irmhard Öser, and legends of the Apostles. See Robert G. Warnock, "Ms. German Codex 1 der Brown University, U.S.A.," *Zeitschrift für Deutsches Altertum und Deutsche Literatur* 121 (1992): 422–33.

19 See on this, recently, Stephen Mossman, "Dorothea von Montau and the Masters of Prague," *Oxford German Studies* 39 (2010): 106–23.

20 Dyan Elliott, "Authorizing a Life. The Collaboration of Dorothea of Montau and John Marienwerder," in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine Mooney (Philadelphia: 1999), 168–91.

of the Birgittine texts and the Birgittine type of holiness (a laywoman, married or widowed, a visionary emulating Christ in his suffering, through which God sends his exhortative messages to the Christianity), on the territory of the Order and in north-eastern Europe.[21] Still, the *Revelations* evidently travelled to Prussia independently of the activity of John of Marienwerder.[22] Johannes Mönch, bishop of Pomerania (1376–1409), is supposed to have owned several excerpts from Birgitta's *Revelations*, both in Latin and in German. A convent belonging to the Birgittine Order was very soon founded on the territory of the Teutonic Knights, in 1394. The establishment of this convent, the third Birgittine house after Vadstena in Sweden, could be connected to the general confessor of the mother house, Magnus Petri, and his stay in Danzig in the early 1390s. There is, however, no evidence of a personal contact between Magnus Petri and Dorothy of Montau or her confessor.

The Jenstein circle left behind a spiritual heritage that the coming generations of priests and theologians adopted and modified to some degree. The *Revelations* of Birgitta of Sweden were frequently copied in the next two decades. There are fourteen extant manuscripts of the so-called Prague redaction of the *Revelations* ascribed to Matthew of Cracow, which originated either in Prague or in central Europe.[23] Three manuscripts of this redaction, stemming from 1394 to 1400, were given to, or bought by, a law student at Prague

21 Petra Hörner, *Dorothea von Montau. Überlieferung. Interpretation. Dorothea und die osteuropäische Mystik* (Information und Interpretation) 7 (Frankfurt am Main: 1993). Writings of John of Marienwerder concerning Dorothy of Montau represent some of the basic sources for research into female spirituality in the Middle Ages. One example from a long list of studies is John W. Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: 2006). An English translation of the *vita* of Dorothea of Montau is found in Johannes Marienwerder, *The Life of Dorothea von Montau, a fourteenth-century recluse*, trans. Ute Stargart (Lewiston, N.Y.: 1997). The most recent monograph on Birgitta of Sweden and Dorothy of Montau is Cordelia Heß, *Heilige machen im spätmittelalterlichen Ostseeraum. Die Kanonisationsprozesse von Birgitta von Schweden, Nikolaus von Linköping und Dorothea von Montau* (Europa im Mittelalter) 11 (Berlin: 2008). See also the review of the book by Otfried Krafft in *Sehepunkte* 9, no. 9 (2009), http://www.sehepunkte.de/2009/09/15504.html [accessed 1 April 2018].

22 In a letter dated to *c*. 1384–91, Magnus Petri lists the ambassador of the Order of the Teutonic Knights among the names of those who had commissioned copies of the *Revelations*, see Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, "Une source du prologue (Chap. 1) aux Révélations de Sainte Brigitte par le cardinal Jean de Turrecremata," *Eranos* 58 (1960): 214–26, at 225.

23 Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, 561 (1465); 562 (1406); 563 (1437); 803 (1464), Kraków, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, AA IX 16 (15th century); DD III 74 (1396); Praha, Knihovna Metropolitní kapituly, C 87 (1392), Praha, Národní knihovna České republiky, VIII D 30 (1407); Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, A 68 (1472); Warszawa, Biblioteka Narodowa, 17067 (1400). There is also a group of three extant manuscripts containing the third redaction of Alfonso of Jaén with the so-called *Additiones et declaraciones*. It can be surmised that they

University for Wrocław or Cracow customers.[24] The increased interest in the *Revelations* from the beginning of the 1390s, testified to by the number of surviving manuscripts of the Prague redaction from this period, is evidently related to the canonization of the Swedish visionary in 1391.[25] Between 1390 and 1410, Prague University was the main center for the dissemination of the *Revelations* in the Holy Roman Empire.[26] It is therefore possible to find in Bohemia the earliest evidence of the use of the *Revelations* by the worldly clergy, in particular in preaching manuals and as a means of moral and ethical education of the laity. Birgitta's visions of the Passion and of the Virgin were especially popular, and passages from these can be found in a number of extant compendia of catechetic, theological, and canon-law texts, which served university-educated clergy as aids in their pastoral practice and parish administration.[27] This also applies to the "fathers" of the Bohemian reform movement, Jan Hus and Jakoubek of Stříbro.[28] There is evidence that they both used the Passion visions of Birgitta of Sweden in their preaching[29] although it is not clear if they relied directly on the corpus of *Revelations* or on some of the excerpts, such as those found in Matthew of Cracow's compilation of Passion visions from the *Revelations*.[30] In general, Birgitta and her work served both theologians as

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were produced in Silesia. See Stephan Flemmig, *Hagiographie und Kulturtransfer: Birgitta von Schweden und Hedwig von Polen* (Berlin: 2011).

24 Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen*, 95.

25 The liturgical feast of St Birgitta was instituted in the Prague diocese in 1401. See Jaroslav V. Polc and Zdeňka Hledíková, *Pražské synody a koncily předhusitské doby* (Prague: 2002), 266.

26 The extent to which Prague University students from Scandinavia might have participated in the reception and dissemination of the *Revelations* cannot be determined. There were many subjects of the Swedish king in Prague; 48 of them are named in extant university registers from 1367 to 1398. See Marin, *L'archevêque*, 552.

27 Such compendia are, for example, manuscripts Praha, Knihovna Metropolitní kapituly, O 31 and O 32, containing excerpts from the *Revelations* and the *Propositio* of Matthew of Cracow; and Praha, Knihovna Metropolitní kapituly, N 6, from the first half of the 15th century, containing many excerpts from works by saints Augustine, Jerome, Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, and Peter Damian, in addition to polemics against the Hussites and extracts from medical books. On fols 85r–93r there are *Locutiones B. Mariae V. Revelatae S. Brigittae*. Praha, Knihovna Metropolitní kapituly, K 35, from the same period, and of similar character, contains a copy of the fifth book of the *Revelations* and excerpts from Book I. Excerpts from *Revelations* are also contained in a volume of anti-Hussite writings from the same period (Praha, Knihovna Metropolitní kapituly, D 118).

28 See František Šmahel, *Die Hussitische Revolution* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica) 43 (Hannover: 2002), 577–635.

29 Marin, *L'archevêque*, 562.

30 See Drahomíra Breedveld-Baránková's edition of the text, *Matthaeus de Cracovia*.

evidence of God's intention: to privilege the simple ones over the powerful ones (Matt. 5:3), and thus to legitimate their own efforts to involve the uneducated lay masses in the decision-making concerning the reform of the Church.[31]

A good example of the use of the *Revelations* in the spiritual education of the laity is the extensive postil written by the Augustinian canon Johlín of Vodňany in 1402–04.[32] It spread rapidly through Bohemia and Moravia and became a favorite preaching handbook in monasteries and rural parishes.[33] The *Revelations* of Birgitta of Sweden are one of the most frequently cited works in Johlín's postil. It is very likely that Johlín owned a copy of all the books of the *Revelations* and used them as his main reference work, freely modifying selected citations to fit the purpose of his own work, which he conceived as a collection of model sermons.

1 The Medieval Czech Translation of Birgitta's *Revelations*

The *Revelations* of Birgitta of Sweden were accessible at the time not only to clergy, but also in a selective Czech translation to lay readers. The translator, Thomas of Štítné, is known by name although his translation was transmitted anonymously. Thomas, a layman and a member of the lower nobility, was influenced by the two generations of reformist thinkers at the court of Charles IV and at the University of Prague. He may have acquired his knowledge and skills of translation of theological and catechetic literature in the circle of intellectuals around Archbishop John of Jenstein (in his various works he names some of the members of the circle as his supporters). According to him it was the vocation of each "spiritual Man," layman or priest, if not to preach and interpret the Scriptures, then at any rate to translate them as well as their interpretations into the vernacular language.[34] They are the very bridge built by Christ and

31 The influence of Birgitta and her work on the leaders of the first phase of the Bohemian reformation was nevertheless scant, or even futile. There is not a single quote from her work in their extant theological and/or ecclesiological writings.

32 Rudolf Říčan, *Johlín z Vodňan, křižovník kláštera Zderazkého* (Zvláštní otisk z Věstníku Královské Společnosti Nauk, Třída I) (Prague: 1929); Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen*, 97–99.

33 Nine of the fourteen extant manuscripts of Johlín's postil are now in Prague, see Praha, Národní knihovna České republiky, I B 28; I D 43; I D 44; IV A 2; IV B 20; IV C 9; IV C 18; IV C 25; IV D 14. Others are in Praha, Knihovna Národního muzea, XII D 8; Praha, Knihovna Metropolitní kapituly, E 35/1–3; Brno, Moravská zemská knihovna, 107. Four transcripts come from monasteries in southern Bohemia, while one is of Moravian origin. No critical editions of the texts are available.

34 See Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen*, 132–35.

the Church Fathers that anyone can use—and only a fool will break his neck in doing so, Thomas concludes. In his definition of the three holy languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, as examples of vernacular languages, Thomas put the Czech language implicitly by their side. The naturalness with which he did so must have rested to some extent on the opinions shared by his circle, in particular people whose judgement he trusted. He mentions in his texts Adalbert Ranconis de Ericinio (Vojtěch Raňkúv z Ježova) as his advisor, who was *scholasticus* at the Chapter of St Vitus Cathedral in Prague and a close collaborator of Archbishop John of Jenstein. Thomas very probably maintained contacts with many members of the University of Prague as well as with the members of the court of the archbishop, especially after he moved to Prague in 1381.

The translation and compilation work of Thomas of Štítné culminated in the 1380–90s. The Latin models he translated include both *antiqui* and *moderni*, and his choice of authorities conforms rather well to the works of pastoral theology that were received at the same time by the Jenstein circle. Yet he cannot be said to have written "to order." His later works from the 1390s contain many personal inserts, memories, and notes about the world he lived in. There is thus reason to believe that he wrote at least some of his works primarily for his family and peers.

Among the extant writings of Thomas of Štítné we find two compilation postils, several anthologies of religious educative texts (mostly compilations from Latin models), and individual translations. The most important among his translations of individual works is that of Birgitta's *Revelations*. The translation is transmitted in two different redactions, both by Thomas. It cannot be determined precisely when the first version was made. The translator's foreword mentions Birgitta's canonization, thereby allowing us to place the text after 1391. Thomas translated a copy of the *Revelations* whose wording was very similar to that of the text extant in the in the earliest manuscripts of the Prague redaction. The oldest dated manuscript, from 1392, contains many characteristic scribal errors that change the meaning of the text and are not reflected in the translation, which means that Thomas must have used an earlier copy of the text.[35] There is therefore reason to believe that Thomas of Štítné owned an early copy of the Prague redaction of the *Revelations*, produced by Matthew of Cracow sometime in the second half of the 1380s, and that he may have started to work on his translation already then.

It is unlikely that Matthew of Cracow directly initiated the translation. In the preface to the first version he is mentioned by Thomas as a promoter of the *Revelations*, but Thomas ascribes his decision to start working on the

35 Praha, Knihovna Metropolitní kapituly, C 87. See Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen*, 156–57.

translation to God's inspiration, linking his own work directly to that of the Swedish visionary.[36] He stresses that Birgitta wrote down her visions, the "holy words of God," in her vernacular, and only after this were they translated into Latin, and he emphasizes that now it is his turn to translate them into his vernacular. The issue of the vernacular as a holy language was crucial to Thomas of Štítné. He knew Birgitta's *Vita* well, and the element that he chose to emphasize from it was the originally vernacular character of the *Revelations*.[37] That is why he wanted to translate it, although, as he points out, he dislikes writing about visions. Thomas was highly skeptical about any form of exalted spirituality. *Temperantia* and *prudentia* were virtues he held in great esteem. We may assume that Thomas did not actually define the *Revelations* as records of visions because of their exhortative character familiar to him from the sermons of the church critical preachers John Milicius of Cremsier and Conrad of Waldhausen, both of whom are mentioned repeatedly in his works.[38]

At the outset, Thomas of Štítné seems to have conceived the translation of the *Revelations* on a grand scale. Having completed the first two books of the *corpus*, at first it seems he decided to put aside the *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges* and immediately started to translate Book III. But soon he changed his mind. Then, after translating several chapters of the *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges*, he abandoned the original intent to translate the *Revelations* in full and began to select texts that covered themes different from the chapters he had already completed. In the end, Thomas translated about one-third of the collection.[39] He then revised the finished translation one more time, abridged it, and reordered it into five thematic "books" (the second auctorial redaction). In each of these, original texts were compiled into different, yet logical, entities to fit the respective subjects of the books. The first book contains personal lessons for the visionary. Thomas of Štítné clearly conceived them as guidelines for contemplation for pious laywomen. The second book contains Birgitta's Marian visions, and the third the Passion visions. The fourth and longest book

36 Pavlína Rychterová (ed.), *Vidění svaté Brigity Švédské v překladu Tomáše ze Štítného* (Sbírka pramenů k náboženským dějinám) 2 (Prague: 2009), 44: "A toť jest i mně sě dálo, ponúklo mne, abych … počal ty kněhy psáti česky …" ("And that also happened to me and I was prompted [in the meaning of: inspired by God] to begin to write these books in Czech").

37 Pavlína Rychterová, "Autorität und Wahrheit in dem alttschechischen katechetischen Schrifttum," in *Autorität und Wahrheit. Kirchliche Vorstellungen, Normen und Verfahren (XIII.-XV. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Gian Luca Potestà, (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs) 84 (Munich: 2012), 113–26.

38 Rychterová, *Vidění svaté Brigity*, 43–44.

39 The first auctorial redaction is extant in two manuscripts, see on these Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen*.

brings general, edifying, and admonishing tidings to Christians, and the fifth addresses bishops, kings, and princes, i.e. ruling secular and clerical elites.[40]

Thomas wrote the first redaction for his daughter, whom he addresses in the preface. In the book, he shows consideration for the readers of his work, having a wealth of experience of translation of pastoral theological works and a good sense of what was appropriate for his public and what was not. He considered at least the first two books of the *Revelations* as perfect material for the spiritual education of pious laymen, and especially women, without having to modify them much.

The second redaction of the translation was explicitly addressed to a wider public. According to its preface, Thomas was prompted to undertake this new redaction of his text by a circle of friends. He may have worked through a direct order from some female convent whose members largely belonged to the same social network. The oldest extant copy of the second version of his translation of the *Revelations*, dated 1419, evidently belonged to a nunnery.[41]

The extant copies of both versions of the translation by Thomas of Štítné exemplify the way the vernacular translations of the *Revelations* were used in the 15th century (the text of the translation was never printed). The most recent copy of the second version of the translation from 1526 is preserved in an anthology of medieval Czech translations of pastoral and catechetic works that was probably made for a south Bohemian noblewoman by her confessor and chaplain.[42] Although he was a Carthusian, his spiritual daughter seems to have come from the Hussite Utraquist nobility.[43] The text of the translation of the *Revelations* is altered in several places and there are additions, with all the passages about administering the sacrament of the most Holy Eucharist in the one kind changed by the author of the copy to administering it in the two kinds—the principal "dogma" of the Hussite Utraquists.[44] This also applies to the third extant manuscript containing the second version of the translation from 1456, although its provenience cannot be ascertained.

The two extant copies of the longer version of the translation, one from the 1460s and the other from 1482, are both based on models consisting of loose

40 The second redaction is extant in three manuscripts, see Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen*.

41 Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen*, 216–18.

42 Rychterová, *Vidění svaté Brigity*, 385–90.

43 Praha, Národní muzeum, IV B 15. The anthology contains religious educative texts designed for women (among others the so-called "Daughter, a tract on the virginal virtues" by Jan Hus). For this MS, see Rychterová, *Vidění svaté Brigity*, 387. The Utraquist Hussites maintained that communion under both kinds, wine and bread, and not just the latter, also should be administered to the laity.

44 Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen*, 216.

sheets that got mixed up in use. In one of the models for the extant copies there must have been some pages missing, those that described the most popular revelations of Birgitta, namely the revelations of the Passion (15) and the vision of the Nativity (21) in Book VII.[45] Supposedly, the first version of the translation by Thomas of Štítné was used in 15th-century Bohemia not only by pious Beguines and nuns, but also by priests. One of them could take the appropriate page with him to deliver sermons on the principal feasts.[46]

2 The Reception of the *Revelations* in the Empire

During the first half of the 15th century, Prague lost its importance as the center for the dissemination and reception of the *Revelations*, and other places in the Holy Roman Empire took over this role. After the promulgation of the decree of Kutná Hora in 1409, which established preferential treatment of the members of the Czech university community over those from the other three nations, Prague University forfeited its status as the most important institution of higher education in Central Europe. After the outbreak of the Hussite revolt in 1419, the university became isolated, and other centers of learning became more important.[47] For the reception of the *Revelations*, the University of Leipzig, founded in 1409 by German masters and students who had left Prague after the promulgation of the decree of Kutná Hora, became crucial. The University of Vienna, which had close contacts with Prague from the 1380s, never became a center of dissemination of Birgitta's texts. Here, pastoral theology was, until the end of the 14th century, dominated by Henry of Langenstein, famous for his skepticism about lay visionaries and Birgitta in particular.[48]

45 Marian visions in the second version of the translation by Thomas of Štítné exist independently in the codex of catechetical texts and Marian prayers from the end of the 14th century. See Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen*, 101–6 and 233–43.

46 Rychterová, *Vidění svaté Brigity*, 11–12. One of the copies of the first redaction of the translation of *Revelations* by Thomas of Štítné is transmitted in an anthology of pastoral texts together with an medieval Czech translation of the *Gesta Romanorum*, the most popular handbook of examples for preaching. Although the provenience of the codex is unknown, it may well have been compiled to meet the needs of a preacher. *Vidění svaté Brigity*, 371–72.

47 František Šmahel, "The Kuttenberg Decree and the Withdrawal of the German Students from Prague in 1409: A Discussion," in *Die Prager Universität im Mittelalter–The Charles University in the Middle Ages. Gesammelte Aufsätze–Selected Studies*, ed. František Šmahel (Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance) 28 (Leiden: 2007), 139–71, here at 159–71.

48 Georg Kreuzer, *Heinrich von Langenstein. Studien zur Biographie und zu den Schismatraktaten unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der "Epistola pacis" und "Epistola concilii pacis"*

The reception of the *Revelations* at the University of Leipzig is associated with a former student who matriculated in 1415, the theologian Johannes Tortsch (1400–45/46), who became rector of the university in 1428.[49] He appears to have been the only scholar to promote Birgitta of Sweden and her heritage in the German-speaking regions of the Empire.[50] Tortsch's most popular work consists of excerpts from the apocalyptic texts of the *Revelations*, extant in the Latin original under the title *Onus mundi*. The work was frequently copied, in particular in an abridged vernacular version entitled *Bürde der Welt* (1434).[51] Apart from *Onus mundi*, Johannes Tortsch was probably the author of another anonymous text that examines the literary heritage of Birgitta of Sweden, *Lucidarius revelationum sancte Birgitte*, written around 1427.[52] The work is a manual for preachers, instructing them on how to select suitable passages from the *Revelations* for sermons on the main feasts. The *Legenda sancte Birgitte* was written at the same time and translated into German around 1433. The *Legenda* was compiled by Johannes Tortsch on the basis of the *Vita* of Birgitta's Swedish confessors, found in the canonization proceedings; of the *Revelations*; as well as of the acts of the canonization process.[53] Like *Onus mundi*, the work was mainly intended to serve as a warning to Christians about the approaching end of the world prophesied by the Swedish visionary (an extract of *Onus mundi* forms a part of the *Legenda*).[54] The *Liber de reprobatione christianorum et vocatione gentium* and the *Liber celestis imperatoris ad milites*, a selection from Birgitta's visions concerning knights and knightly orders, were written in 1428–30, when Johannes Tortsch was working on the second redaction of *Onus mundi*.[55]

(Quellen und Forschungen aus dem Gebiet der Geschichte. Neue Folge) 6 (Paderborn: 1987). See also Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378–1417* (University Park, Pa.: 2006), 185–87; Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbridge: 1999).

49 Suse Andresen, *In fürstlichem Auftrag. Die gelehrten Räte der Kurfürsten von Brandenburg aus dem Hause Hohenzollern im 15. Jahrhundert* (Schriftenreihe der historischen Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften) 97 (Göttingen: 2017), 415–16.

50 Ulrich Montag, *Das Werk der heiligen Birgitta von Schweden in oberdeutscher Überlieferung. Texte und Untersuchungen* (Munich: 1968), 190.

51 On this, see http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/955 [accessed 1 October 2018].

52 Montag, *Das Werk*, 189–90.

53 Montag, *Das Werk*, 186–87. It is not clear how Johannes Tortsch came by the manuscript.

54 The Latin original of the *Legend* has only survived in two manuscripts, one of which is incomplete. See Montag, *Das Werk*, 184–85.

55 Montag, *Das Werk*, 184–94; Ulrich Montag, "The Reception of St Birgitta in Germany," in *The Translation of the Works of St Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars*, eds. Veronica O'Mara and Bridget Morris (Turnhout: 2000), 110–11.

Onus mundi is transmitted in ten manuscripts containing four redactions by the author, the first produced before 1424 and the last around 1433.[56] It is a selection from the *Revelations* and other apocalyptic texts that should be understood as an admonition, a reform proposal, and a prophecy.[57] In the introduction, the author informs the reader about Birgitta of Sweden, her life, and her legacy, and the principles for his selection from her visions. Tortsch chose visions that announce the coming disasters and threats to the world. The subsequent 26 chapters of excerpts from the *Revelations* first explain the reasons why God chose to send his message to the Christians, relate how it was written down by the visionary, and warn readers not to disparage it. These introductory remarks are followed by dark prophecies of future disasters awaiting Christendom and all social ranks, and teachings about ways of averting God's wrath. The last four chapters consist of prophecies of visionaries who lived before Birgitta, namely the Sibyls, Gregory the Great, Hildegard of Bingen, and Joachim of Fiore, bearing out the authenticity of Birgitta's messages.[58]

Just like Matthew of Cracow and the other theologians in the Jenstein circle, Johannes Tortsch was convinced that many of God's admonitions and warnings in the *Revelations* would be fulfilled, finding around him signs that the foretold tribulations were already taking place.[59] The similarity is not at all accidental: Johannes Tortsch was familiar with Matthew's interpretation of the work of Birgitta of Sweden, and in *Onus mundi* he cites directly from Matthew's *Proposicio super canonisacione beate Brigide*.[60] In his eyes, the only way to avoid damnation was sincere penance among all the ranks of Christian society and serious endeavors to improve the state of the Church.[61] *Onus mundi* was frequently copied in the second half of the 15th century and its success is indicated by it being printed as early as 1485 (the German translation was printed even four years earlier).[62]

56 See Montag, *Das Werk*, 152–54. The fifth redaction produced by an anonymous author at the end of the 15th century is extant as part of *Libellus de quibusdam futuris*. See Montag, *Das Werk*, 163–64.

57 Montag, "The Reception," 110.

58 Montag, *Das Werk*, 151–52. For an edition of the fourth author's version of the Latin text and its Low German translation, see *Das Werk*, 251–329.

59 In his *Legend,* Johannes Tortsch writes that God's wrath will come "adhuc in diebus multorum eorum, qui tempore sancte Birgitte vixerunt" ("yet in the lifetime of many of those who lived in the time of St Birgitta"). See Montag, *Das Werk*, 88.

60 Montag, *Das Werk*, 331.

61 Montag, "The Reception," 110.

62 Montag, *Das Werk*, 154–55.

One of the signs of a disjoined world, in the work of Tortsch, is the Hussite wars of 1420–34.[63] Attacks on the Hussites are found in the third redaction of the work, from 1431 to 32 (the Bohemian reformers Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague, who were condemned by the Council of Constance to be burnt at the stake as heretics in 1415 and 1416, respectively, are here portrayed as the personifications of heresy).[64] The polemic aim imparts to this redaction of *Onus mundi* a different character from the previous ones. The author shifts his emphasis from a general apocalyptic theme to an appeal to suppress a concrete heresy. The third redaction of the work was probably written after the failed crusade of Cardinal Julian Cesarini against the Hussites, which ended with the crusaders fleeing for their lives at the battle of Domažlice in 1431. After this debacle, the Council of Basel decided to parley with the Hussites and thus opened the way to peace and recognition of the Utraquist confession in the Kingdom of Bohemia and Moravia. The acerbic admonishments and warnings addressed to the religious and secular rulers in the third redaction of *Onus mundi* may express the author's disappointment about the evolution of the Hussite wars, which he could follow from nearby Leipzig. As the Hussite troops often raided the border regions, the Hussite heresy posed a real threat to the population of Leipzig. It appears that Tortsch's tractate met with a positive response in the monastic milieu of the areas that were confronted with the Hussite problem. Some extant copies of *Onus mundi* stem from different religious orders, largely in south-east Germany.[65] Tortsch's tractates were owned, as were the *Revelationes*, by the Benedictine monastery Tegernsee and the Benedictine archabbey of St Peter in Salzburg.[66] The *Revelations* and the third redaction of *Onus mundi* were also held by the convent of Augustinian hermits in Regensburg.

Monastic communities in the late medieval Empire were in general very interested in the writings of Birgitta of Sweden. Most of the extant copies of the *Revelations* from the 15th century whose provenance can be determined were produced in monastic scriptoria or were acquired for monastery libraries in the south-eastern regions of the Empire.[67] It appears that especially the Cistercians had a predilection for Birgitta's texts. The extant copies

63 Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen*, 109–10. On the evolution of the Hussite wars towards the end of the 1420s, see Šmahel, *Die Hussitische Revolution*, 1452–96.

64 Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen*, 109.

65 Johannes Tortsch apparently strived assiduously to spread his Birgittine tractates. See Montag, *Das Werk*, 182.

66 Undhagen, "Special Introduction," in Rev. I, p. 120.

67 It should be kept in mind that many manuscripts may have been lost during the Reformation in the 16th century, when many monasteries in central and northern German areas were closed. The libraries remained largely undamaged in south German Catholic

originated in Cistercian convents in Leubus (Silesia),[68] Heilbronn (Bavaria),[69] Osek (Bohemia),[70] Vallis Sancti Petri in Heisterbach (Nordrhein-Westfalen),[71] and in an unknown Cistercian monastery in the diocese of Cologne.[72] Three copies come from Carthusian monasteries: Salvatorberg in Erfurt (Thuringia),[73] Buxheim near Memmingen (Schwaben),[74] and from an unknown monastery in Mainz.[75] Likewise, the Benedictines liked to place the *Revelations* in their libraries. Two manuscripts containing excerpts from the *Revelations* come from the monastery of Tegernsee (Bavaria),[76] one complete copy from the Salzburg archabbey, another from the monastery of Abdinghof in Paderborn,[77] and one from the monastery of St Peter in Erfurt.[78] Apart from the convent of Augustinian hermits in Regensburg, one copy of the *Revelations*[79] was owned by the St Mary's convent of the Canons Regular of St Augustine in Bödingen, Nordrhein-Westfalen.[80]

It was only from the second half of the 15th century that the role of the imperial and university centers of Birgittine reception began to be taken over by the Birgittine convents. Two copies of the *Revelations* from the 15th century come from Marienforst at Godesberg, near Cologne, and from Marienwater in Brabant, respectively.[81] The key impulse for spreading the *Revelations* through the new print medium came from the Birgittine Order. It was the two member towns of the Hanseatic League, Lübeck and Stralsund, that initiated the foundation of the Birgittine convents Marienwohlde, near Lübeck (1431), and Marienkron, near Stralsund (1421); the Lübeck printer Bartholomeus Ghotan published the first printed version of the *Revelations* in the so-called Ghotan Redaction

monasteries until the wave of secularization towards the end of the 18th century. See Montag, "The Reception," 107.

68 Undhagen, "Special Introduction," in Rev. I, p. 122.

69 Ibid., 116–18.

70 Ibid., 71–72.

71 In this case it is an excerpt from *Revelations*, see ibid., 129.

72 Ibid., 175.

73 Ibid., 133–34.

74 Ibid., 132–33.

75 Ibid., 194.

76 Ibid., 125–26.

77 Ibid., 204–9.

78 Ibid., 137.

79 Ibid., 115–16.

80 Ibid., 200–1.

81 Ibid., 178.

in 1492. The convent in Gnadeberg had already planned a print edition of the *Revelations* several years earlier, but this never materialized.[82]

In the Bohemian areas the Birgittine Order was never active. The main reason may have been the dragged-out economic and political troubles afflicting the Kingdom of Bohemia from the last twenty years of the 14th century, which eventually led to the revolt of the Hussite reformers at the end of the 1420s. The subsequent religious wars of fifteen years' duration led to a long-term political, economic, and religious isolation of the Bohemian Hussite-Utraquist kingdom in the second half of the 15th century. The Hussite revolt, from its reformatory university-based beginnings in the early 1400s, also very much influenced the nature of religious life in Bohemia.[83] Founding new monasteries in a country whose secular, Catholic, and Utraquist elite for decades secularized church property with verve was not the order of the day. No copies of the Latin version of the *Revelations* from the monastic milieu have survived in Bohemia apart from one manuscript originally owned by the Cistercian convent in Osek. The lack of extant copies may also be due to destructions of monasteries and of their libraries during the religious wars in 1420–34.

In the 15th century, the religious orders on the territory of the Holy Roman Empire, in particular the women's orders, also took a decisive part in the reception of the *Revelations* in the vernacular languages. Mixed codices intended for lay Beguine communities or women's convents predominate. Several such codices from the 15th century, written in Czech, also survive in Bohemia; they contain passages from the *Revelations*, as well as other texts ascribed to Birgitta.[84] In one of the manuscripts a brief compilation from the translation of the *Revelations* by Thomas of Štítné is combined with a version of the *Fifteen Oes* plus further Marian prayers and contemplative texts. In the 15th century, some Birgittine inspirations also made their way into iconography. The popularity of the adoration type of Nativity, which took its inspiration from the vision contained in Rev. VII: 21, is borne out in Bohemia and Moravia by a number

82 Montag, *Das Werk*, 102, n. 3. On the Ghotan redaction of the *Revelations* as well as on their selective translation into Low German (*Sunte Birgitten Openbaringe*, printed in Mohnkopf Press in the year 1496) see Elizabeth Andersen, "Birgitta of Sweden in Northern Germany: Translation, Transmission and Reception," in *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages*, eds. Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann, and Anne Simon (Leiden: 2014), 205–30.

83 Josef Macek, *Víra a zbožnost jagellonského věku* (Edice Každodenní Život) 6 (Prague: 2001). The transformation of religious life during the Hussite wars was probably the reason why a complete vernacular translation of *Revelations* was never printed as it was in the German areas.

84 Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen*, 100–8.

of 15th-century panel paintings and illuminations, largely in hymn books of urban religious fraternities of the time.[85] Unlike in German-speaking regions, no translation of the *Vita* of St Birgitta, or of the rule of her order, has survived in the Czech-speaking milieu. The earliest version of the Low German translation of the rule of the Birgittine Order, made in the second quarter of the 15th century, comes from the Birgittine convent in Gnadeberg.[86] Translations of the rule spread during the 1400s in Low German and Middle German, both within and outside of monastic communities.[87]

In the German-speaking parts of the Empire the vernacular reception of the *Revelations* seems to have begun slightly later than in Prague, the first center of reception.[88] The oldest Middle German codex, written around 1400, with a translation of Marian visions from Book VII of the *Revelations* (Rev. VII: 15, 16, and 21) comes from Saxony. Another Middle German translation of the *Sermo angelicus* from the same period comes from the region around Cologne.[89] In the first half of the 15th century, more translations of individual visions of Birgitta appeared, with most extant codices containing excerpts from the *Revelations* originating in Dominican convents in southern and central Germany.[90] More codices of this type were owned by the Dominican convent of

85 Pavlína Rychterová, "The Iconographic Motif of the Nativity of the Adoration Type and the Visions of Bridget of Sweden in Medieval Bohemia," *Annali di scienze religiose*, Ser. NS 2 (2009): 199–217. On the impact of Birgitta's Nativity vision on iconography, see also Chapter 8 by Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby in the present volume.

86 Montag, *Das Werk*, 135.

87 The first so-called *Regula in prima persona* is extant in German-speaking regions of the Empire in several copies of the Latin original. The later modified so-called *Regula in tertia persona* was expanded and translated into German. A special version of the *Regula* made in Italy, which is essentially a combination of the two principal versions, was brought to the newly founded convent at Gnadenberg by monks from the Birgittine monastery Paradiso, near Florence. Its German translation was received in the second half of the 15th century, when the reception of *Regula in tertia persona* already predominated. This adapted redaction was received in southern Germany outside the Birgittine Order. Montag, *Das Werk*, 128–50.

88 The situation is similar in Poland. The earliest extant fragment of the Polish translation of the *Revelations* comes from the middle of the 15th century. It cannot be ascertained whether it is somehow related to the hypothetic translation that was made, according to the chronicler Jan Długosz, for the Polish Queen Jadwiga at the end of the 14th century. See Rychterová, *Die Offenbarungen*, 84.

89 Montag, *Das Werk*, 93.

90 There are six known codices with excerpts from *Revelations* of different lengths from the first half of the 15th century, see Montag, *Das Werk*, 93. Montag mentions 29 manuscripts containing German excerpts from the *Revelations.* His list can be extended with another three codices, (a) Lübeck, Stadtbibliothek, Theol. Germ. 8° 66 from 1470, provenience: unknown cloister; (b) Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Cod. Chart. B 269, from the early 15th

St Katharina in Nuremberg, which was apparently the center of dissemination of the vernacular versions of the *Revelations* in the specific milieu of the female convents.[91] Many similar codices from a later period originated in the female convents of the Canons Regular of St Augustine, the Cistercians, and the Franciscans. The reception of Birgitta's *Revelations*, like the copy of the Czech translation by Thomas of Štítné preserved in a parchment codex from 1419, was directed at the spiritual education of the nuns. The nuns largely received from the *Revelations* chapters that contained edifying parables for an improvement of spiritual life.

This also applies to the Low and Middle German translations of the *Vita* of Birgitta of Sweden written by Johannes Tortsch, transmitted under the title *Leben und Wunderwerke St. Birgitten*, of which ten anonymous copies exist in different anthologies of pastoral theological and hagiographical texts.[92] The translation was probably made in the Dominican convent of St Katharina in Nuremberg, from where the earliest extant copy dated to 1445 comes. Another manuscript containing excerpts from the *Revelations* was made by a nun of the order of St Claire in Cheb (Eger) in North Bohemia in 1473. Other manuscripts dated to the middle of the 15th century were the property of the Dominican convents in Strasbourg and in Steinbach, and of a Beguine community in Hamburg.[93]

The Middle Low German version of the translation of Tortsch's *Legenda* was used as a basis for a broader selection from the *Revelations* in German translation, printed in 1496 by Mohnkopfdrucker printing company in Lübeck (*Sunte Birgitten openbaringe*), which, like the other vernacular excerpts, was intended to serve as a book for pious instruction. The text, of which the translation of Tortsch's *Legenda* takes up approximately one-third, was probably drafted by a member of the Birgittine convent Marienwohlde, near Lübeck.[94] The first complete German translation of the *Revelations*, based on Ghotan's print of 1492, appeared in print in 1502. It was based on a deluxe edition of the Latin

century, provenience unknown (contains Low German translation of Rev. VI: 65); (c) Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, mgf 532, from 1461, provenience unknown, Middle German Dialect.

91 Montag, *Das Werk*, 13 and 94. Montag supposes that the Nuremberg Dominicans' interest in Birgitta's *Revelations* is connected with the founding of the Birgittine convent Gnadenberg in the vicinity.

92 Petra-Maria Dallinger, "Studien zu Leben und Wunderwerke der heiligen Birgitta von Schweden 1: Verlegung einer Biographie" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Vienna, 1991), 28–31.

93 Dallinger, "Studien zu Leben und Wunderwerke," 28–30.

94 Montag, *Das Werk*, 193–94. For more details in this respect, see Andersen, "Birgitta of Sweden," 210.

Revelations printed by Anton Koberger in Nuremberg in 1500 and whose text is an exact copy of the Ghotan edition, with rich woodcuts from the workshop of Albrecht Dürer (the print run was financed by Sir Florian Waldauf of Waldenstein, protonotarius of King Maximilian I, who sponsored the work). Koberger's German edition printed two years later used the same illustrations and layout. Also, the translation was initiated and financed by Waldauf.[95]

The most popular book by Johannes Tortsch, *Onus mundi*, in translation *Bürde der Welt*, also enjoyed a remarkable vernacular reception in German-speaking areas of the Empire. It is often present in codices also containing *Leben und Wunderwerke St. Birgitten*.[96] The fourth redaction of *Onus mundi* was translated before 1434, and this High German version is transmitted in fourteen manuscripts, with another four manuscripts containing single passages of different length. The translator condensed the Latin model, leaving out Tortsch's flowery theological interpretations of the Birgittine texts, which he translated in full. He treated his model in the same way that can be identified in many vernacular translations of pastoral theological literature across Europe. *Bürde der Welt* was disseminated in this form in southern Germany, where most of the extant manuscripts originated in female convents, above all in Dominican houses. In addition, two manuscripts come from Benedictine monasteries and one comes from the Franciscans. None can be attributed to Birgittine convents, which followed Tortsch's writing with suspicion (to put Birgitta on the same level as Merlin was surely not in accordance with the policy of the order on how the holy founder should be presented).[97] A single copy was made in 1480, by the layman Mikuláš Leman, school headmaster at Šluknov in northern Bohemia, most likely to serve his personal needs.

The bulk of copies of *Bürde der Welt* are preserved in anthologies often containing the same set of texts. In addition to *Bürde*, it is most frequently *Die drei Birgittenfeste* (an abridged translation of *Festa sancte Birgitte*, probably made by the same translator as *Bürde der Welt*), *Leben und Wunderwerke St. Birgitten*, and an anonymous so-called *Himmelsbrief*, God's admonition threatening punishment for non-observation of Friday fast and Sunday worship.[98] The composition and the predominant provenance of these anthologies suggest that they probably served as material for contemplation and spiritual education of the nuns. Besides, *Bürde der Welt* was apparently read as a reformist

95 Montag, *Das Werk*, 104–23; Montag, "The Reception," 109.

96 In all, *Bürde der Welt* exists in eighteen manuscripts (see http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/955) and in several old prints published by different printers between 1482 and 1625. Nine of these editions are extant. See Montag, *Das Werk*, 20–22 and 155–57.

97 Montag, *Das Werk*, 180–82.

98 Montag, *Das Werk*, 169.

tractate—exactly what the author of its Latin model intended it to be. In some codices *Bürde der Welt* is accompanied by the translation of *Reformatio Sigismundi* and *Reformation Kaiser Friedrichs III.* The moment *Bürde der Welt* crossed the boundary of the print medium, in 1482, its popularity is likely to have increased in lay circles. From the following thirty years, nine print editions are known. For many German-speaking laypeople in the Empire who lived outside the monastic orders, where Birgitta's *Revelations* were very popular, *Bürde der Welt* was probably the only opportunity to read about Birgitta's visions. Koberger's expensive edition of the full German translation of the *Revelations* from the early 16th century certainly was not accessible to everyone.

As a quintessence of Birgitta's message, *Bürde der Welt* figured in the anti-Lutheran polemic and became the model for other works of its kind, such as *Onus ecclesiae*, written by Berthold Purstinger, bishop of Chiemsee, in 1519 (the book was printed five years later). Purstinger follows Tortsch, who placed Birgitta of Sweden on a par with Gregory the Great, Hildegard of Bingen, and Joachim of Fiore, and cites her *Revelations* together with prophetic texts attributed to others, such as Catherine of Siena, Telesphorus, Methodius, Reinhardus, Merlinus, and the Sibyls. *Onus mundi* evidently made a substantial contribution to the legend of Birgitta of Sweden as an apocalyptic prophetess, which became fixed during the 16th and 17th centuries. Around this time, Birgitta's second life as a Passion visionary took form in the work of the uncommonly prolific Baroque writer Martin of Cochem. The *Revelations* provided the main source of inspiration for his most successful work, the exceptionally popular *Das Grosse Leben Christi* from 1694. This book was one of principal fundaments of lay piety in the countries of the Empire until the 20th century.[99]

3 Conclusion

At a first glance, the reception of the *Revelations* of Birgitta of Sweden in the territory of the Holy Roman Empire was very heterogeneous. But it has a common point of departure. The ways in which the *Revelations* were read and interpreted in Prague in the 1380s determined the lines along which the text was successively understood and used in different social contexts, and defined its place in the spirituality within the Holy Roman Empire. Especially the understanding of the *Revelations* laid down by Matthew of Cracow had a lasting impact. The most successful "reader's digest" of Birgitta's visions, the tractate

99 Pavlína Rychterová, "Pašije Ježíše Krista. Od Brigity Švédské k Melu Gibsonovi" [Passion of Christ: From Birgitta of Sweden to Mel Gibson], *Dějiny a současnost* 4 (2006): 16–19.

Onus mundi written by the theologian Johannes Tortsch in the first half of the 15th century, built on Matthew's interpretations and developed them further. From the 14th until the 16th century, Birgitta's work was excerpted in many different ways; mainly as a handbook of pious instruction for nuns and devout laywomen and as a guide for the true and proper *imitatio Christi*, but also as a model and perfect example of vernacular theology, and as an aid for moderately talented preachers. Furthermore, the *Revelations* served as a political argument in the polemic surrounding the Schism, as a compendium of apocalyptic admonitions, as a prophetic enigma about the coming of the antichrist, and as a key to the understanding of current events (for instance, the Hussite wars or the German Reformation) and their place in God's providence. Finally, Birgitta's work served as an instrument in the struggle against heresy, and as a strong argument in debates about church reform.

Not only the *Revelations* but also their author represented a very attractive model to follow. Birgitta's *Vita* was very popular, especially in the female convents of southern Germany. But it was not only pious women who saw the visionary as an example of a perfect Christian life—so did church hierarchs, such as Matthew of Cracow or the archbishop of Prague, John of Jenstein. There is no copy of the *Vita* transmitted in Bohemia. But the whole arrangement of Jenstein's self-understanding as a charismatic church leader bears unmistakable signs of inspiration by Birgitta and her legacy.[100] Birgitta's model was extremely successful, most of all because of its flexibility. Her many personae—as a holy widow, founder of a religious order, visionary, lay theologian, prophet, and church politician—expressed not only in her *Vita* but also, and mainly, in the *Revelations*, were able to address all social groups and individuals who could proceed to build their own "construction" of Birgitta and her legacy according to the needs of their respective time, place, and situation. Thus, Birgitta could be venerated by the Teutonic knights and by the Polish king and his court as they fought each other at the battle of Tannenberg in 1410, both under the patronage of the Swedish saint (the Polish king won the battle, and consequently the Teutonic knights stopped supporting the canonization of Birgitta's Prussian follower Dorothy of Montau). In baroque spirituality, the reception of the *Revelations* was developed further, and it was reduced at the same time. Finally, their role as a handbook of religious education gained the upper hand, and as such, Birgitta's *Revelations* remain in use to this day.

100 Pavlína Rychterová, "Charisma und charismatische Legitimation in der Vita von Johannes von Jenstein," in *Kunst als Herrschaftsinstrument: Böhmen und das Heilige Römische Reich unter den Luxemburgern im europäischen Kontext*, ed. Jirí Fajt (Munich: 2009), 346–53.

CHAPTER 10

Birgitta and Late-Medieval English Spirituality

Ann M. Hutchison

Born into a noble family in Sweden with a reputation for piety, married to an important Swedish lawman, a mother of eight, and a visionary with a strong prophetic sense, St Birgitta had a remarkable ability to capitalize on her position, but put to even greater effect was her ability to apply her natural gifts in a transformative manner. Following the death of her husband, Ulf Gudmarsson, in 1344,[1] she had an important vision in which Christ called on her to be his "bride" and his "channel" (*sponsa et canale*), and it was particularly as the "channel," or communicator of divine knowledge,[2] that Birgitta carried out what she felt was her mission. Even before this crucial vision, however, Birgitta had recognized the need for religious reform and had begun considering possible remedies. Later, in May 1346, when King Magnus Eriksson bequeathed his palace at Vadstena for conversion to a monastery, Birgitta already had her own plans for founding an order and may even have composed the new rule.[3]

Birgitta's concerns coincided with the directions that the religious life in England was taking during the 14th century, particularly in the later years of the century. Recognizing the general laxity of a number of religious houses, many felt the need for more rigorous observance. This was manifested throughout that century and into the next with the founding of a number of Carthusian houses, for Carthusians were known for their austerity and strict observance, attributes which Birgitta came to champion.[4] Toward the end of the 14th century and well into the 15th, women desired to take a larger role in religious

1 This may have been in 1346; see Bridget Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden* (Woodbridge: 1999), 60 and n. 85. See also the introductory chapter of the present volume, n. 9.

2 See Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 66, 67 and n. 10.

3 See Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, who suggests, for example, that planning for a new order may have begun even before the death of her husband in 1344 (60 and notes 82 and 85); she also notes that the *Revelaciones extravagantes* include revelations appearing to be early drafts of the rule, and there are others indicating some of her apprehensions concerning the planned order (86, e.g. Extrav.: 1–25, 28–38, 40).

4 Six Charterhouses were founded in England in the 14th century: Beauvale Priory 1343, London 1370, Hull 1377, Coventry 1381, Axholme 1397, and Mount Grace Priory 1398. In the 15th century, Sheen Priory was founded in Richmond in 1414, and Perth Charterhouse in Scotland in 1429. For further information on the English Carthusians, see E. Margaret Thompson, *The Carthusian Order in England* (London: 1930).

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life, and this is seen particularly in the production of devotional works and the increase in women's literacy, both of which were important to Birgitta and were reflected in the rule of the order she would eventually found. In England, promotion and encouragement of women's literacy were often demonstrated visually in wall paintings and illuminations of St Anne teaching the Virgin to read. Birgitta's devotion to Mary, a major part of her vision for her new order, was also reflected in English piety—for England had long been designated "dos Mariae" or "Mary's dower (dowry)"—and during this period Marian devotion became intensified.[5]

1 English Contact with Birgitta

It is likely that Birgitta first became known to the English in the late 1340s as the result of a revelation concerning the Hundred Years' War, in which she took the English side, claiming (correctly) that the pope had sided with the French. This led to correspondence in 1348 with Edward III both on account of Birgitta's revelation and her suggestion that the matter be resolved by means of marriage. Somewhat later, King Magnus asked for one of Edward's daughters in marriage on behalf of his sons, thus opening up possible ties with Sweden.[6]

In East Anglia, perhaps on account of its proximity to the Continent and its many ports bringing visiting merchants and other travelers to England, knowledge of Birgitta, some of whose revelations were beginning to be published, began to circulate.[7] Adam Easton, a native of East Anglia who had become a Benedictine in the Norwich Cathedral Priory, and who was respected from an

5 The origin of the title is not clear, although it has been traced by some to as early as 1051; by the mid-14th century it had become more widely known, as a remark in a sermon by mendicant preacher John Lathbury that "it is commonly said that the land of England is the Virgin's dowry" makes clear. As the result of a letter to English bishops by Thomas Arundel in 1400 referring to England as "Mary's dowry," it is thought to have been current by the 15th century, and in the reign of Henry V it seems to have reached a climax—it was believed that Mary "had compassion on the people of her dower of England" before and during the battle of Agincourt; see, for example, Lynn Staley, "Enclosed Spaces," in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, eds. Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: 2010), 113–33, at 117; and Nigel Saul, *For Honour and Fame: Chivalry in England, 1066–1500* (London: 2011), 208–9.

6 See Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 81–82 and notes 58–61.

7 Immediately after her death in 1373, Birgitta's confessors had put together the *Liber celestis revelacionum*, and this soon began to circulate, though some revelations had circulated independently earlier. By the early 15th century, the *Liber* had been translated into seven vernaculars, one of which was English.

early age for his intelligence and intellectual ability, developed a strong devotion to Birgitta.[8] Though details of when and how he came to know about her cannot be determined, over time he became deeply familiar with her *Revelations* and other writings. In 1367 he went to Rome, where Urban V had moved that year, along with the papal Curia. At some point, he may even have met Birgitta, who received permission for at least one audience with Urban in the summer of 1370.[9] Whether or not he actually met her, Easton held similar views on the return of the papacy to Rome, and the need to champion the superior claims of the papacy and the Church against the temporal monarchs.[10] In 1381 Easton was made a cardinal by Urban VI, and shortly afterward he was one of three cardinals asked to sum up the findings of the commission appointed to consider the canonization of Birgitta and to prepare for the process. In January 1385, however, he, along with five other cardinals, was accused of attempting[11] to limit papal power and was arrested and imprisoned on orders from Urban VI. It was only after the new pope, Boniface IX, was elected in 1389 that Easton, the sole survivor of the ordeal, was released, reinstated as cardinal, and reassigned to the task of examining Birgitta's writings. He attributed to Birgitta strong and effective intercessory powers, and he felt that not only had she brought about his survival and deliverance but also his endurance of torture at the hands of the "tyrants," and he vowed to continue this work with "*diligenciam meam totam.*"[12] In a letter to the abbess and community of Vadstena after the completion of his *Defensorium Sanctae Birgittae*, which consisted of a

8 Accounts of Easton's life are given by L.J. Macfarlane, "The Life and Writings of Adam Easton OSB" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1955), 1–34; and by J.A. Schmidtke, "Adam Easton's Defense of St. Birgitta from Bodleian MS. Hamilton 7 Oxford University" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1971), 2–28.

9 By then the pope had retired to Montefiascone to avoid the heat and perhaps also the deteriorating political and military situation in Rome; see Arne Jönsson (ed.), *Alfonso of Jaén: His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi* (Lund: 1989), 43–47, at 43.

10 Schmidtke, "Adam Easton's Defense," 18, 20. His major work, the *Defensorium ecclesiasticae potestatis*, argued for the precedence of papal sovereignty, or power of the Church, over that of kings and was dedicated to Urban VI: this was likely the cause of his being made cardinal; see "Adam Easton's Defense," 17–18.

11 For a detailed discussion of Easton's arguments, see Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: 2001), 183–92.

12 See Schmidtke, "Adam Easton's Defense," 34 and n. 1, who quotes from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Hamilton 7, fol. 248: "vovi ad devotam Birgittam … ut ipsa intercederet pro me ad beatam Mariam et filium eius Christum, quod me a suis [Urban's] periculis tirannicis liberaret, et ad eius canonizacionem poneram diligenciam meam totam." Concerning the effects of Birgitta's intercession, he stated, "in tantum quod in tormentis positus tyrannorum nulla tenus penam sensi."

detailed response written to defend Birgitta against an attack on her orthodoxy by an anonymous Perugian adversary, Easton told them that he felt that his continuous prayers to Birgitta to intercede on his behalf to the blessed Virgin aided him in the composition of his treatise.[13]

2 English Defenders of Birgitta

Easton was the first of the English theologians to write to defend Birgitta during the controversies which surrounded the *Revelations* and the *Regula Salvatoris* (the rule of her order which she also received through revelation). The chief focus of the attack, to which Easton responded, was the fact that a woman had been chosen to found a new order. He pointed out the role of women as witnesses at the time of the Resurrection and as receivers of the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost, and in carefully constructed arguments he refuted the other charges of his opponent.[14] Somewhat later, about 1393, Geoffrey, abbot of Byland, defended the orthodoxy of the *Revelations* through a series of detailed discussions of specific passages.[15] Again, at the Council of Basel (1431–49), controversy arose concerning the *Revelations*, the indulgences, and the concept of double orders, and an English bishop, Reginald, wrote two short defenses arguing that prophecy was a gift of the Holy Spirit and that it did not end with the revelation of the New Testament. He also observed that Birgitta's holy life was proof of the authenticity of her visions.[16] As F.R. Johnston notes, these defenses show that English theologians were studying Birgitta's works carefully, and he also points out that they were used by priests, especially those responsible for the spiritual direction of women both inside and outside the cloister.[17]

13 Though the year is not given, Macfarlane dates the letter to 9 February 1390 on the grounds that Adam signs it *Cardinalis Anglie* (he was restored as cardinal in December 1389), and since he asks them to pray for the canonization, the process for which was completed early in 1391; Macfarlane, "Life and Writings of Adam Easton," 237. Schmidtke, "Adam Easton's Defense," gives a translation of the relevant parts of the letter and in a note provides a transcription of the Latin, 34–35 and 35, n. 1.

14 Apart from Bodleian, Hamilton 7, the *Defensorium Sanctae Birgittae* survives in London, British Library, Harley 612; Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library, A.5.4; and in C 518 and C 621 of Uppsala University Library.

15 His defense can also be found in British Library, Harley 612.

16 Reginald's two defenses are also in British Library, Harley 612.

17 F.R. Johnston, "The English Cult of St Bridget of Sweden," *Analecta Bollandiana* 103 (1985): 75–93, at 84–85.

3 Founding a House of the Birgittine Order in England

As a result of negotiations for the marriage of Philippa, daughter of Henry IV and sister of the future Henry V, to the Swedish King Eric in 1406, Birgitta's new order and its mother house at Vadstena became more widely known in England, and this prompted a strong desire to found a house of the order there. Following the wedding,[18] Sir Henry (later Lord) FitzHugh signed a pledge to grant his manor of Cherry Hinton, near Cambridge, toward the establishment of the first Birgittine monastery in England.[19] About four years later, a letter from one of the brothers from Vadstena (brought by Lord FitzHugh to England), to the confessor general of Vadstena reveals that there was a plan to convert the hospital of St Nicholas in York to an English house of the Birgittine Order, but in the end the project was not carried out.[20]

As Jeremy Catto has pointed out, there were many, including those "in responsible positions, who were concerned with the purification of popular religion and the promotion of individual conscience among the laity" at this time.[21] Moreover, Catto notes the importance of the personal involvement of Henry V, "the first king since Henry III to have shown more than conventional piety," who was aware that "the service of religion was a matter for his government."[22] The plan to found the monasteries of the Birgittines at Syon and the Carthusians at Sheen as palace monasteries in the vicinity of the restored palace at Sheen was "designed to place the monarchy at the spiritual centre

18 The wedding took place on 26 October 1406; see E.B. Fryde et al. (eds.), *The Handbook of British Chronology*, 3rd ed. (London: 1986), 41.

19 The pledge was dated "*circa festum beati Andree apostolic*"; see Eric Graff, "A Neglected Episode in the Prehistory of Syon Abbey: The Letter of Katillus Thornberni in Uppsala University Library Pappersbrev 1410–1420," *Mediaeval Studies* 63 (2001): 323–36, at 323–24 and n. 4; also Neil Beckett, "St. Bridget, Henry V and Syon Abbey," in *Studies in St. Birgitta and the Brigittine Order*, ed. James Hogg, 2 vols (Analecta Cartusiana) 35:19 (Salzburg: 1993), vol. 2: 125–50, at 126–27 and notes 22 and 23.

20 See Graff, "Letter of Katillus Thornberni," 326, *passim*; also Beckett, "St. Bridget, Henry V and Syon Abbey," 127 and n. 23. The two brothers FitzHugh brought to Cherry Hinton and supported from 1408 to 1415 were John Peterson (priest) and Katillus (deacon); Peterson returned to Vadstena in 1416 and Katillus in 1421. There is no firm evidence, however, to show that there was ever a monastery at Cherry Hinton, and indeed the Syon *Martiloge* calls the 1420 profession "the first in England" ["Anno domini 1420 … celebrata erat prima professio ordinis sancti Saluatoris de Sion in regno Anglie …"]; British Library, Additional 22285, fol. 14v; and Margaret Deanesly, *The Incendium Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole* (Manchester: 1915), 95–102.

21 Jeremy Catto, "Religious Change under Henry V," in *Henry V: The Practice of Kingship*, ed. G.L. Harriss (Oxford: 1985), 97–115, at 99.

22 Catto, "Religious Change under Henry V," 106–7.

of English life."[23] Moreover, the rules of these orders, as Henry recognized,[24] demonstrated a commitment to spiritual exercises and austerity of life that would serve as the model he was seeking to institute in the wake of perceived Lollard challenges to royal authority and, earlier, of Wyclif's perceived disruptions of religious and secular authority.[25] Above all, he wished to "strengthen liturgical celebration and observance in order to draw down divine favour,"[26] and indeed the two foundations became "powerhouses of intercessory prayer for the realm of England and the focus of orthodox guidance for the personal religion of the laity."[27] Moreover, Henry V developed a strong attachment to St Birgitta, appealing to her in both his first and his last wills. In 1415 he laid the foundation stone, and in the prologue to the foundation charter he made clear that the house was to be dedicated "especially in honour of the most holy St. Bridget," and that he wished it to be called the "Monastery of St. Saviour and St. Bridget of Syon."[28] Two years later, he addressed a *supplica* to Pope Martin V requesting confirmation of his foundation at Syon and also of Birgitta's canonization, "influenced by ardent devotion and love for the same St. Bridget."[29] Later, St Mary was added, and the "Monastery of St. Saviour and St. Mary and St. Bridget" came to be known as Syon Abbey.[30] Situated in a prominent position on the River Thames, it soon became a beacon of orthodoxy.[31]

23 Catto, "Religious Change under Henry V," 111. Originally Henry had planned to found three monasteries, but the wars with France precluded the founding of the Celestine house.

24 Henry had received first-hand information on the mother house at Vadstena from officials involved in arranging the marriage of his sister, Philippa, to the Swedish king in 1406, in particular, Henry, Lord FitzHugh, who had actually visited the monastery. Philippa herself became very attached to Vadstena and was accorded the honour of being buried in the church; see Marie-Louise Flemberg, "Queen Philippa as a Benefactor of the Birgittines," *Birgittiana* 19 (2005): 181–92.

25 Catto, "Religious Change under Henry V," 111.

26 See Saul, *For Honour and Fame*, 213.

27 See Jeremy Catto, "The Burden and Conscience of Government in the Fifteenth Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 17 (2007): 83–99, at 97.

28 See Neil Beckett, "St. Bridget, Henry V and Syon Abbey," 127; see also G.J. Aungier, *The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery, the Parish Isleworth and the Chapelry of Hounslow* (London: 1840), 26.

29 See Beckett, "St. Bridget, Henry V and Syon Abbey," 127; the *supplica* was actually submitted in 1418.

30 Found in the charter of Henry VI, and given in Latin and English in Aungier, *The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery*, 60 and 411.

31 Henry laid this foundation stone at its first site in Twickenham, but in 1426 the Regent, John, duke of Bedford, laid another at Isleworth, a less marshy site almost directly across the river from Henry V's Carthusian house of Bethlehem of Sheen; see A. Jefferies Collins, *The Bridgettine Breviary of Syon Abbey* (Henry Bradshaw Society) 96 (Worcester: 1969), ii and n. 1.

4 Syon Abbey: Early Years

While Syon dates its foundation to 1415, it also recognizes the date of its first professions. On 21 April 1420, Archbishop Henry Chichele enclosed twenty-seven sisters, five priests, two deacons, and four lay brothers. Soon afterwards Syon began attracting both new professions[32] as well as devout laity. Notable among the latter was Margaret, duchess of Clarence (d. 1439), who in 1428, "desiring to live a celibate life," had petitioned the pope to be allowed to reside near Syon, a permission she was granted in October of that year.[33] Her choice of Syon was not a random one; Henry V had been her brother-in-law, and her late, second husband Henry's younger brother, Thomas, duke of Clarence, had been among those who, along with the king, signed Syon's foundation charter.[34] Through her family, Margaret may also have had some devotion to St Birgitta; her youngest sister was named Bridget (not then a usual name among English nobility) and had become a nun, though not a Birgittine, since Syon Abbey had not yet been established. Along with permission to live near Syon, Margaret was also given the authority to choose her own confessor from among the Birgittine priest-brothers.[35] Since the brethren, like the nuns, were enclosed, special permission had to be given to allow her confessor to travel "up to a distance of two miles" to her place of dwelling "as often as she wishes." This was exceptional, and, as papal letters indicate, this agreement was twice more confirmed.[36] The confessor chosen was Simon Wynter,[37] and although in late 1429 Margaret wrote to the pope requesting that Wynter, who was ill, be allowed to move to a monastery "of more lax observance and rule,"[38] there is

32 As Collins notes, "the community grew so rapidly that the ninth profession was celebrated on 12 October 1427"; see Collins, *The Brigdettine Breviary*, iv and n. 4.

33 *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters* (hereafter *Papal Letters*), ed. J.A. Twemlow (London: 1906), vol. 13: 63–64; I would like to thank Robert Shaw for providing me with the material from the *Papal Letters*. See also George R. Keiser, "Patronage and Piety in Fifteenth-Century England: Margaret, Duchess of Clarence, Symon Wynter and Beinecke MS 317," *Yale University Library Gazette* 60 (1985): 32–46, at 37 and n. 6.

34 Signed on 3 March 1415; see Aungier, *The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery*, 30.

35 Earlier, in August 1422, she had been granted a plenary indulgence to choose her own confessor and celebrate Mass privately in a location of her own choosing; see *Papal Letters*, vii, 321, 323–24.

36 See *Papal Letters*, xiii, 63–64, 170. Margaret was also, unusually, granted permission to enter the enclosure six times a year; see *Papal Letters*, xiii, 70.

37 M.B. Tait, "The Bridgettine Monastery of Syon (Middlesex) with special reference to its monastic uses" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1975), 249, wonders if prior to joining Syon Wynter might have been a chaplain in the household of the duchess.

38 *Papal Letters*, xiii, 174–75.

no evidence that Wynter actually left Syon.[39] In fact, he can be seen as a model of what was expected of a Birgittine priest-brother in the capacity of spiritual adviser.

Most notably, Wynter compiled and translated a life of St Jerome in Middle English (it was based on a number of Latin sources) for Margaret and dedicated it to her.[40] The Prologue, addressed to the "Ryght noble and worthy lady," provides an early example of the nature of the spiritual guidance offered by Syon's brethren.[41] On St Jerome's day (the day after Michaelmas), he had told her "somwhat of þe lyfe and myraclys" of the saint, and he reminded her of how he had said that "wyth oure Lordys help when I had laysere I wolde wryte his lyfe and myracles on Englysh to the praysynge and worshep of oure Lorde and of hym." His purpose, he explains, is not only that "3e shulde knowe hit the more cleerly to 3oure goostly [spiritual] profyte," but also that it might "turne to edificacion of other that wolde rede hit or here hit." Wynter then requests her "first to rede hit"—and, it should be noted, there is no question of her ability to read—and then she should have it copied for herself before passing it on to others to read and copy, "for ther is thynge therynne ful needfull to be knowe and had in mynde of all folk."[42] What is particularly interesting here is that right from the beginning (this life has been thought to have been written in the late 1420s or early 1430s, certainly before 1439, the year of the death of the duchess)[43] the Syon brethren recognized the "outreach potential" of their duties. Also worth noting is the addition at the end of the Life of two of Birgitta's *Revelations* relating to St Jerome.[44] In the first, Our Lady tells Birgitta that through Jerome, who turned from false wisdom and found true wisdom, and who "dispysed erthly worship [honour] and wan God himself," she has been sent a salutation from God. Our Lady also points out that Jerome was "a

39 In 1423, Wynter was one of those accompanying the Confessor General Thomas Fishbourne to Rome to ensure Syon's status as a double monastery, and so he had been at Syon almost from its foundation and would seem to have had a deep interest in both the house and its founder; see Collins, *The Bridgettine Breviary*, xxxix–xl and xl, n. 2.

40 See "Holland [married name Beaufort], Margaret, duchess of Clarence (b. in or before 1388, d. 1439)," R.L.J. Shaw, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *ODNB*) online edition (Oxford: 2008; online edn. 2009), article 98133 [accessed 20 September 2017].

41 See Claire M. Waters (ed.), *Virgins and Scholars: A Fifteenth-Century Compilation of the Lives of John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, Jerome, and Katherine of Alexandria* (Turnhout: 2008), 178/179–274/275, at 178/179.

42 "Saynt Ierom," in Waters, *Virgins and Scholars*, 178/179–180/181.

43 See George R. Keiser, "The Mystics and Early English Printers: The Economics of Devotionalism," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers Read at Dartington Hall, July 1987*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge, U.K.: 1987), 9–26, at 36.

44 See "Saynt Ierom" in Waters, *Virgins and Scholars*, 270–75.

lovere [friend] of wydews, a myrrour of alle þat profyte [increase] in vertu, and a doctour and techere of alle trouthe and clennes."[45] In a later revelation Our Lady, reminding Birgitta of what she had said about Jerome earlier, adds that "Ierom [Jerome] was a trompe [trumpet] by whiche þe Hooly Gooste spake" and also "a flaume [flame] inflaumyd of [by] þat fyre þat come vppon me and vppon þe appostelis on Pentecost day." She concludes that "þay þat here [þis] trompe and folew [follow] þereafter" are blessed.[46] Today the survival of four 15th-century manuscripts and an early printed copy of *c.* 1499 suggests the success of this venture.[47] As scribal evidence indicates, the life also circulated within Syon and Sheen, and the *Registrum* of the brothers' library has a record of a complete and an incomplete copy.[48]

Margaret in her turn was generous to Syon.[49] Among her gifts was a new folio-size, professionally produced, two-volume *Sanctilogium Saluatoris* complied by Symon Wynter.[50] Today only the first volume is known to have survived.[51] Folios 141r to 154v contain the feast and the life of Birgitta, opening with a lovely historiated initial showing the angel dictating the *Sermo angelicus* to Birgitta. The text has been corrected from a copy already at Syon, as is noted at the foot of folio 154v.[52] It is likely that the volume was completed before the death of Margaret in 1439, and it is another indication that from early in the 15th century there was a strong devotion to Birgitta in England.

45 Waters, *Virgins and Scholars*, 272/273, from Rev. IV: 21.

46 Waters, *Virgins and Scholars*, 272/273–274/275, from Rev. VI: 60; see Acts 2:2 for the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

47 The manuscripts are: Yale Beinecke, 317; St John's Cambridge N. 17, Lambeth Palace Library 72 and 432; the printed edition of *c.* 1499 is by Wynkyn de Worde (*STC* 14508); see Keiser, "Patronage and Piety," 42–43.

48 See Vincent Gillespie (ed.), *Syon Abbey*, with *The Libraries of the Carthusians*, ed. A.I. Doyle (Corpus of Medieval Library Catalogues) 9 (London: 2001), items M.17 and M.22 in Betson's *registrum*, 223–24, 226.

49 She gave at least seven books for the monastery, including a fine Bible; see Shaw, "Holland [married name Beaufort], Margaret, duchess of Clarence," *ODNB* (as above). For a list of individual donations to the Syon library for the brethren, see Gillespie, *Syon Abbey*, 818.

50 Wynter's *Sanctilogium* was based mainly on John of Tynemouth; see Gillespie, *Syon Abbey*, items M.1 and M.2 in Betson's *registrum*, 212.

51 It is in Karlsruhe, Germany, in the Badische Landesbibliothek Skt Georgen in Villingen cod. 12 and has recently been digitized, see http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31–68928. I am grateful to Virginia Blanton for drawing this to my attention and for providing images.

52 A sign (three dots with a stem) is followed by "*corrigatur ille processus ad hoc signum* [here the sign occurs again] *per librum attestacio in Syon scripto in papiro.*"

5 Other Margarets Associated with Syon Abbey

Margaret was the first of a number of aristocratic Margarets, all related, to be associated with Syon. Perhaps the most notable was her granddaughter, Lady Margaret Beaufort. Through Lady Margaret's influence Margaret Pole came as a widow with two of her children in 1504 and remained there until 1509,[53] and her goddaughter, Margaret Windsor, became a nun and the last pre-Dissolution prioress. Lady Margaret herself had an intimate association with Syon. In 1504 she was granted permission, with six attendants, to enter the enclosure, converse with the nuns and priest-brothers, and even have meals there.[54] Likewise she sponsored the printing of devotional works for Syon from the printer Richard Pynson in 1505, and probably earlier, since it seems that in 1503 she arranged for the printing of an English version of Thomas à Kempis's *Imitatio Christi* and later the same year was subsidizing multiple copies.[55] From about 1508 until her death in 1509, Wynkyn de Worde became her printer and supplier of books.[56] Her household accounts indicate that she supported Syon in various other ways as well.[57]

Another noteworthy Margaret, but less prominent socially, was Margaret, Lady Hungerford and Botreaux (d. 1478).[58] For almost twenty years she worked to save the family fortune, but in doing so she often found herself compromising her principles. Eventually, she realized that she would have to justify herself to God, and from 1469 she sought what she felt were the best ways of attaining salvation: the example and liturgy of the Birgittines at Syon provided her with one important means of doing so. For approximately six months in 1470, she

53 Susan Powell has written about both women in the context of Syon; see Susan Powell, "Margaret Pole and Syon Abbey," *Historical Research* 78 (2005): 563–67, and "Syon Abbey and the Mother of King Henry VII: The Relationship of Lady Margaret Beaufort with the English Birgittines," *Birgittiana* 19 (2005): 211–24; parts of these articles have been reworked and appear in Susan Powell, *The Birgittines of Syon Abbey: Preaching and Print* (Texts and Transitions) 11 (Turnhout: 2017), chapters 6 and 7.

54 Susan Powell, "Lady Margaret Beaufort: Books, Printers, and Syon Abbey," in *The Birgittines of Syon Abbey*, 184; Powell also notes that she seems to have kept a room at Syon, though the license did not permit her to stay overnight, and to have contributed to the provisions, 184.

55 Powell, *The Birgittines of Syon Abbey*, 181 and 189.

56 Powell, *The Birgittines of Syon Abbey*, 190–93.

57 For example, a payment in 1507 for bread and ale seems "to indicate provision for the whole community," Powell, *The Birgittines of Syon Abbey*, 184.

58 See M.A. Hicks, "The Piety of Margaret Lady Hungerford," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38 (1987): 19–38.

had withdrawn to Syon after her arrest following the Lincolnshire Rebellion, and there she had experienced the liturgy of the sisters.[59] She was especially moved by the service after Terce when the psalm *De profundis* (Psalm 129/130) was said before an open grave into which the abbess threw some earth. The service was intended to remind the nuns of death and the Last Judgement so that they too could prepare themselves appropriately to be among those chosen to rise and live in everlasting joy.[60] She was also impressed by the *Indulgete*, another service unique to Syon, in which at the beginning of Evensong alternating sides of the sisters' choir forgive and ask forgiveness of others.[61] Carefully chosen borrowings from these rituals adorned the mortuary chapel in Salisbury Cathedral that Margaret endowed, and other elements of the Sisters' Breviary were selected by her to become part of its special liturgy.[62] Indeed, as M.A. Hicks has pointed out, Margaret had "far-reaching knowledge of the liturgy": she was also aware of the latest developments and was "discriminating in her selections from different uses." In sum, she was an example of the active faith of the literate laity at this time.[63] Wishing to ensure her ultimate salvation, she left instructions for "an impressive funeral" for her heart at Syon, thus indicating the powerful value seen in the prayers and observance at Syon Abbey.[64]

59 Hicks suggests that Margaret "was evidently admitted as a sister," since she was promised that following her death she would receive the same suffrages as would be given the brethren and sisters, but if she were to become a sister, she would have to have been professed and remain enclosed. Since she was under house arrest it is more likely that, like the widows and vowesses who lived in the precincts, Margaret, having given a sum of £200, would have been treated as a lay member of the Syon community; see Hicks, "The Piety of Margaret Lady Hungerford," 25.

60 See John Henry Blunt (ed.), *The Myroure of oure Ladye* (Early English Text Society, Extra Series) 19 (London: 1873; repr. 1998), 142–43; this is a translation and explanation of the Syon Breviary for the Sisters written by one of the priest-brothers in the first half of the 15th century.

61 See Hicks, "The Piety of Margaret Lady Hungerford," 26; also Blunt, *The Myroure of oure Ladye*, 150–51.

62 Hicks, using the work of 18th-century antiquarians, describes this chapel in detail. He also suggests that the Birgittine service book she possessed was *The Myroure of oure Ladye*; while she shows knowledge of this work, it is perhaps more likely that she owned the Sisters' Latin Breviary, since she made use of Latin prayers as well as those in Middle English; see Hicks, "The Piety of Margaret Lady Hungerford," 23–24, 27–30.

63 Hicks, "The Piety of Margaret Lady Hungerford," 38.

64 Hicks, "The Piety of Margaret Lady Hungerford," 34.

6 Translation and Circulation of Birgitta's *Revelations*

Devotion to Birgitta and attraction to her new monastic order extended well beyond the upper classes and became more prominent in the 15th century, especially after versions of the *Revelations* had begun appearing in translation. In a wide-ranging investigation, Roger Ellis has noted that there is a subgroup of Latin manuscripts that was either executed in England or written by English scribes that form a distinctive tradition of the Latin text of the *Revelations*, and that the two Middle English translations of the whole text, British Library MSS Cotton Claudius B I and Julius F II, follow this tradition.[65] He also cautions that English readers knew only the first seven books of the *Revelations*, and he gives as an example Thomas Gascoyne (d. 1458), "one of the best informed Brigittine scholars of his day."[66] In the course of the 15th century, however, other traditions became available to English scribes. Using compilers' extracts, Ellis isolates three main strands of the *Revelations* that were of most interest to English readers. These are: those containing a prophetic element; those describing the requirements of the spiritual life; and those offering information about the life of Christ and the Virgin.

An early devotee of the *Revelations* was the well-known mystic Margery Kempe, who, as the discovery of her *Book* in 1934 revealed, was deeply familiar with the life and ideals of Birgitta. Margery was a citizen of Lynn, an important port in East Anglia on account of its proximity to the Continent, and undoubtedly a source of knowledge of Birgitta, as mentioned above.[67] Also, as Hope Emily Allen speculates, Margery may have been aware of Birgitta from ongoing discussions among clerics of her canonization.[68] In her *Book* Margery tells us that the *Revelations* were read to her, and indeed there are references to a number of Birgitta's visions throughout the text. For Margery, a married woman who had given birth to fourteen children, Birgitta provided an ideal model: she showed how the roles of mother and wife could be combined with a life of devotion, how one could be spiritually renewed by means of a vow of

65 Roger Ellis, "'*Flores ad fabricandam … coronam*': An Investigation into the Uses of the Revelations of St Bridget of Sweden in Fifteenth-Century England," *Medium Aevum* 51, no. 2 (1982): 163–86, at 165–66.

66 See MS lat. th. E. 33 of Bodleian Library, fol. 1r; also Ellis, "*Flores ad fabricandam*," 166.

67 See above regarding Adam Easton. Lynn, a major trade center at that time, is the port in East Anglia with the closest links to Sweden, and there on 26 August 1415 a small delegation from Vadstena arrived to help in the establishment of Syon Abbey.

68 See Hope Emily Allen, "Prefatory Note," *The Book of Margery Kempe*, eds. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen (Early English Text Society Original Series) 212 (London: 1940; repr. 1997), lvii.

chastity, and even more aptly, how Christ himself and his mother might communicate with a woman who had lived her life in the world. In fact, Margery seems to have adopted a number of devotional practices based on what she knew of Birgitta and the way of life she advocated. Most prominent were the conversations, or "*daliances*," with Christ, primarily, but also with his mother. Later, with the permission of Christ himself, these were recorded in her *Book*, and it is worth noting that the version that has come down to us was begun in 1436 on 23 July, the feast of the death of St Birgitta, a date of whose significance Margery would have been well aware.[69] On the other hand, Margery, a member of the urban elite and seemingly rather aggressive in personality,[70] felt a need to compete with her more noble "mentor," and in the *Book* from time to time Christ or his mother assures her that she is experiencing things that were also revealed to "Seynt Bryde," or, she tells the reader, not found in "[B]ridis boke."[71] In addition, we learn from the *Book* that Margery followed Birgitta's earthly path in a number of ways, visiting her house in Rome and going on some of the same pilgrimages, in particular to Jerusalem. She was also familiar with the order and is thought to have visited the Birgittine house when she was in Danzig, a place in which Birgitta's cult was especially popular,[72] and, on her return to England from Germany, she went to Syon Abbey (probably in 1434[73]) at Lammastide in order to receive the "Pardon of Syon," a special indulgence for pilgrims to the abbey.[74] Writing in the third person Margery says she visited "Shene, a iii days beforn Lammes Day, for to purchasyn hir pardon thorw the mercy of owr Lord."[75] In the church itself Margery had one of her

69 See Barry Windeatt (ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Harlow: 2000; repr. Cambridge, U.K.: 2006), 204/3133. Citations from Margery's *Book* are from the Windeatt edition.

70 Margery was the daughter of John Burnham, a prominent citizen of Lynn and five times its mayor. She was born about 1373, the year of Birgitta's death.

71 See *The Book*, ed. Windeatt, 115/1257–58, 129–30/1528–31.

72 Danzig was an early foundation; the date is uncertain, but it was before the end of the 14th century; see Sister Patricia, O.Ss.S., "The Foundation of the Abbey in Vadstena," in *Studies in St. Birgitta and the Brigittine Order*, vol. 2: 27–48, at 28–29. Margery stayed in Danzig "for about five or six weeks"; see *The Book*, ed. Windeatt, Book II, Ch. 4; see also Johnston, "The English Cult of St Bridget of Sweden," 88.

73 See the "Chronology of the Life of Margery Kempe" (viii) and the note to line 8269 (418) in Windeatt's edition (cited above).

74 The vigil of the feast day of St Peter ad Vincula marked the beginning of Lammastide, when special indulgences were granted to Syon; this privilege had been granted to the order by Pope Urban VI; see, for example, Susan Powell, "Preaching at Syon Abbey," in *The Birgitttines of Syon Abbey*, 57; and Johnston, "The English Cult of St Bridget of Sweden," 75; see also Margery Kempe, *The Book*, Book II, Ch. 10.

75 See Windeatt, *The Book*, 418/8269–70. The use of Sheen to denote Syon Abbey was not uncommon.

by now famous fits of weeping brought on by, first, her awareness of "hir gret unke[n]dnes ayens hir maker," times at which, as she saw it, she "offendyd hys goodness"; secondly, the realization of "the gret abhominacyon [i.e. loathing] that sche had of hir synnys" (419/8295–96); and finally, in contrast, because of "the gret excellent charite of hir redemptowr" (8296–97). Though entirely different in manner, Margery, like Margaret, Lady Hungerford, wanted to be sure she had done all that was possible to prepare herself for a good death.

An English man who celebrated Birgitta for some of these same reasons was "the Blynd Awdlay," the Augustinian chantry priest John Audelay of Haughmond Abbey in Shropshire, across the country from East Anglia. A near contemporary to Margery, Audelay is an important early witness to the significance of both Birgitta and the new house of her order, Syon Abbey, which he refers to as "BregiSion" (i.e. Bridget of Syon),[76] showing how closely Birgitta continued to be associated with her English house after its foundation.[77] We learn of Audelay's devotion to Birgitta from a Middle English poem he wrote toward the end of his life, "Salutation to Saint Bridget."[78] The poem opens with an arresting salutation, "Hayle, maydyn and wyfe, h[ayle]! wedow Brygytt," a salutation with strong Marian associations. The frequent repetition of the word "Hayle" gives the impression that the poem itself is intended to be a prayer or meditation, and it concludes with a heartfelt "Amen."[79] Like Margery and other followers of Birgitta, Audelay was particularly impressed that she combined the roles of wife, widow, and maiden; in fact, in a later verse he quoted the Virgin's words to Birgitta which ask her to forego her tears and thank her son through whose death she has been given the "powere" to be "wyfe, wedow [widow], and may [maiden]" (15–18). Again in his concluding verse he referred

76 See John the Blind Audelay, *Poems and Carols* (*Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 302*), ed. Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo: 2009), line 138; see also n. 78 below; hereafter line numbers will be given in parentheses after the quotation.

77 The poem must have been written between 1422 and the death of Henry V, since Henry VI, or "3ong Kyng Herré" (195) is mentioned, and before 1426, by which time all of the poems were shown to have been written; see Richard Firth Green, "Marcolf the Fool and Blind John Audelay," in *Speaking Images: Essays in Honor of V.A. Kolve*, eds. Robert F. Yeager and Charlotte C. Morse (Asheville, N.C.: 2001), 559–76, at 565–66.

78 Audelay's poems are preserved in Oxford, Bodleian MS Douce 302. There are two editions of the poems: the first, published in 1931, is incomplete, Ella Keats Whiting (ed.), *The Poems of John Audelay* (Early English Text Society Original Series) 184 (1931; repr. Oxford: 2006); the later edition, published in 2009 and edited by Susanna Fein (see above n. 76), restores information, such as titles, missing in the earlier edition. The "*salutacio Sancte Brigitte virginis*" is number 23.

79 The word "Hail" is repeated fifty-five times in the poem; see Martha W. Driver, "John Audelay and the Bridgettines," in *My Wyl and My Wrytyng: Essays on John the Blind Audelay*, ed. Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo: 2009), 191–217, at 192, 195, and *passim*.

to her as "merceful may" and "vergyn verement [true virgin]" (200, 205), and his hope was that prayers to Birgitta could achieve her blessing for "joy and blis perpetualy" (207). Just as he saw the spiritual power of Birgitta, Audelay believed that the same was true of her order and specifically "Bregitsion," which he claimed was the most holy house of her order (154), referring to it as "that spiritual plas [that spiritual place]" (181). He was aware that "Our gracious Kyng Herré the v" (137) was the founder of "BregiSion" (138), and whether or not he actually went to Syon Abbey, he located it fairly precisely (136). Throughout the poem, moreover, Audelay provided many detailed references to both St Birgitta and Syon Abbey, indicating that he knew the key features that characterized the order and its rule. Several times he mentioned the Syon Pardon; he knew that Urban VI granted it, that it was the same pardon as given in St Peter's Church in Rome, and especially that it gave "playn remyssion."[80] In addition, he laid particular emphasis on Syon's strict observance (163–72), which, as he noted, gave the prayers of its members especially strong intercessory efficacy: "Fore thay may throgh here precious prayoure purches here our grace,/ Have we never in this word [*sic*] wrogh so moche wo."[81] His emphasis is certainly heartfelt, since earlier in his life as the chaplain to Richard Lestrange he was witness to a terrible sacrilege when at vespers on Easter Sunday 1417 in the Church of St Dunstan's-in-the-East Lestrange killed an unarmed knight with whom he had had a running feud. Though Audelay was not charged, he was nevertheless guilty by association and, as the family priest, he would have been to some extent responsible for those he served.[82] It is little wonder, then, that Audelay in his old age—and undoubtedly even before—felt a desperate need to atone in every possible way for this great abomination, especially since he believed that his later loss of sight, and eventually of hearing too, came upon him as a direct result. Audelay's poem, clearly articulating the appeal of St Birgitta, her *Revelations*, and her order, provides an excellent contemporary witness to the important place they held in English devotional life in late medieval England.

80 "[F]ull remission (of sins)," lines 55–63; Audelay also mentions the Pardon in lines 104–8 and 140–44.

81 "For they may through their precious prayer purchase here our grace / Even if we have in this world caused so much woe" (183–84).

82 See Michael Bennett, "John Audelay: Some New Evidence on his Life and Work," *The Chaucer Review* 16 (1982): 344–55.

7 St Birgitta's *Vita*

While Birgitta's *Revelations*, revealing her communications with Christ, Mary, and a number of saints, attracted widespread attention from their first appearance in the late 14th century, her *Vita*, with which Audelay appears to have been familiar, seems to have offered a similar appeal. The first known life composed in England was written in Latin and can be found in the same manuscript as the *Revelations*, though it was written in a different hand,[83] and, as Johnston notes, its author seems to have known Birgitta in Rome, and, like many of the lives composed in England, it "shows a refreshing independence of the standard Swedish lives."[84] Among other things, it gives a description of her pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1372,[85] and it also includes a detail not found elsewhere which suggested that shortly before her death Birgitta was planning to visit St Catherine of Siena before returning to Sweden to join the Vadstena community.[86] When the first English translations of the *Revelations* began to appear in the early 15th century, they were also accompanied by *vitae* also in English, drawn from various sources, and emphasizing different facets of Birgitta's life and mission. The account in British Library, Cotton Julius F II, for example, emphasizes Birgitta's prophetic powers and her insistence on the need for church reform,[87] while that preceding another English translation of the *Revelations* from the same period, but of northern provenance, is an adaptation of Birger Gregersson's office for Birgitta's feast day.[88] This life includes

83 The hands are English and, though different, are contemporary; see Johnston, "The English Cult of St Bridget of Sweden," 79. This *vita* along with two others has been edited by Stephan Borgehammar, "Vitae Birgittae. En översikt och tre editioner," in *Humanitas: Festskrift till Arne Jönsson*, eds. Astrid M.H. Nilsson, Aske Damtoft Poulsen, and Johanna Svensson (Gothenburg: 2017), 175–97.

84 See Johnston, "The English Cult of St Bridget of Sweden," 79; the manuscript, also containing the *Revelations*, is Merton College, Oxford, 215; see Johnston, "The English Cult of St Bridget of Sweden," 79, notes 30 and 31.

85 See Johnston, "The English Cult of St Bridget of Sweden," 76.

86 See Johnston, "The English Cult of St Bridget of Sweden," 79. Birgitta and St Catherine were, in a number of ways, kindred spirits; both strongly believed that the pope should return to Rome, and they worked tirelessly to achieve that aim; their spirituality was also similar, and one of the earliest books translated for the Syon nuns was St Catherine's *Dialogo*. See Phyllis Hodgson and Gabriel M. Liegy (eds.), *The Orcherd of Syon* (Early English Text Society) 258 (London: 1966), [v]. See also the forthcoming volume *Sanctity and Female Authorship in the 14th Century and Beyond: Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena*, eds. Maria H. Oen and Unn Falkeid (New York).

87 See Johnston, "The English Cult of St Bridget of Sweden," 79.

88 Found in British Library, Cotton Claudius B I; see Johnston, "The English Cult of St Bridget of Sweden," 79. This manuscript has been edited by Roger Ellis, *The Liber Celestis of St Bridget*

two points of special interest: first that she was having the Bible translated into her "modir tonge," and secondly that in Rome she was instructed to learn Latin and that St Agnes often taught her, with the result that "within a litill time sho profited so greteli þat sho couthe vndirstand and speke wele Latin."[89]

A different approach is taken by the author of an English life a century later. This version of *The Lyfe of Seynt Birgette*, which has often been thought to be "one of the best prose translations of the time,"[90] is also considered the most significant of the lives in English.[91] It was printed by Richard Pynson in 1516 as the middle of three texts, the first being *The Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande*, and the third Walter Hilton's *Mixed Life*.[92] The positioning of the *Vita* of the Swedish saint in the midst of texts solely English in both content and authorship without apparent need for explanation or apology shows just how much a part of the English devotional scene Birgitta had become in the century, and more so since she first became known to the English. It is not surprising that Johnston felt that "it seems that she (i.e. Birgitta) had become English by adoption."[93]

Pynson's justification for including Birgitta's *Vita* and his emphasis are telling; she was

> "a holy and blessyd wydowe" and worthy of readers to loke vpon, moost in especiall for them that lyue in matrimony or in the estate of wydowhod, þat they may se what grace and virtue was in this blessyd woman which lyued in the same degre as they do, and the rather to be encouraged to desire to haue lyke grace and virtue.[94]

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of Sweden: *The Middle English Version in British Library MS Claudius B 1, Together with a Life of the Saint from the Same Manuscript* (Early English Text Society, Original Series) 291 (Oxford: 1987); Ellis, "A Life of St Bridget," [1]-5. For the *Vita* by Birger Gregersson, see Isak Collijn (ed.), *Birgerus Gregorii, legenda sancta Birgitte* (SFSS Ser. 2) 4 (Uppsala: 1946).

89 Ellis, "A Life of St Bridget," [1], 4.

90 Johnston, "The English Cult of St Bridget of Sweden," 81.

91 Roger Ellis, "Notes on Some Latin and Middle English Lives of St Bridget of Sweden," unpublished draft referred to in "*The Lyfe of Seynte Birgette*: An Edition of a Swedish Saint's Life for an English Audience," eds. Ann M. Hutchison and Veronica O'Mara, in *Booldly bot meekly: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages in Honour of Roger Ellis*, eds. Catherine Batt and René Tixier (The Medieval Translator) 14 (Turnhout: 2018), 174 and n. 5.

92 STC 4602. *The Kalendre* is an English translation of John of Tynemouth's *Nova legenda Angliae*, a compilation of English saints.

93 Johnston, "The English Cult of St Bridget of Sweden," 81.

94 See Hutchison and O'Mara, "*The Lyfe of Seynte Birgette*," 176–77; also edited in Manfred Görlach (ed.), *The Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande* (Middle English Texts) 27 (Heidelberg: 1994), 46.

Here we are reminded of Margery Kempe, who, a century earlier, wished to renew herself as a holy woman after having married and given birth to fourteen children; or of widows, such as Margaret, duchess of Clarence, who, having been twice widowed and having vowed not to remarry,[95] desired to live in the precincts of Syon Abbey, and who chose for her spiritual guide one of Syon's priest-brothers. The *Lyfe* concludes with a prayer to "this glorious spouse of oure sauyoure Cryste Ihesu, … that she praye for vs vnto our Lorde that by the merytys of hyr prayers after this transytory *and* short lyfe we maye come to the euerlastynge lyfe in the blysse of heuyn."[96]

8 Syon Abbey in the 1530s and Beyond

During the troubled times of the 1530s, Syon held firmly to its orthodox principles, and it became a refuge for many needing advice and guidance. Its priest-brothers wrote treatises designed to encourage both the nuns and brothers of Syon, as well as the devout laity,[97] and in their printed works, a woodcut of St Birgitta, as a pilgrim and with pen in hand receiving divine inspiration, was always present to remind readers of her example.[98] Though Henry VIII, who had viewed Henry V as a role model, did not demand the surrender of Syon, on 25 November 1539 the community was "putt out" of its house, which the chronicler Charles Wriothesley, in a rare evaluative comment, called "the vertues [most virtuous] howse of religion that was in England."[99] This episode, however, did not mark the end of the English Birgittines, nor were Birgitta's *Revelations* forgotten. Though "putt out" of its house, Syon Abbey did not

95 See Shaw, "Holland [married name Beaufort], Margaret, duchess of Clarence," *ODNB* (as above).

96 Hutchison and O'Mara, "*The Lyfe of Seynte Birgette*," 205.

97 See, for example, J.T. Rhodes, "Syon Abbey and its Religious Publications in the Sixteenth Century," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44 (1993): 11–25; or Alexandra da Costa, *Reforming Printing: Syon Abbey's Defence of Orthodoxy 1525–1534* (Oxford: 2012).

98 Edward Hodnett, *English Woodcuts 1480–1535* (London: 1935; repr. 1973), no. 457, fig. 54; see also Martha W. Driver, *The Image in Print: Book Illustration in Late Medieval England and its Sources* (London: 2004), 145–49; and Roger Ellis, "Further Thoughts on the Spirituality of Syon Abbey," in *Mysticism and Spirituality in Medieval England*, eds. W.F. Pollard and R. Boenig (Cambridge, U.K.: 1997), 291–44, analyses the woodcut and also comments on the publications of the brothers.

99 Charles Wriothesley, *A Chronicle of England During the Reigns of the Tudors, from A.D. 1485 to 1539*, ed. W.D. Hamilton (Camden Society) 1 (Westminster: 1875), 109.

surrender its seal or its keys;[100] instead, members of the order retired in groups to the safety of Catholic houses in England, although one group went abroad. In 1546 following the death of the last pre-Reformation abbess, Agnes Jordan, one of the younger sisters, Catherine Palmer, collected those well enough to travel abroad, and they were taken in at the Birgittine house of Maria Troon (Mary's Throne) in Dendermonde (Termonde) in Flanders. In 1553 when Mary I came to the throne and England was reconciled with Rome, she established at least six religious houses, including Syon Abbey.[101] Those who had remained in England returned to the monastery in 1556, and in 1557 they were joined by the community from abroad. Syon Abbey was once more enclosed and Catherine Palmer formally made abbess. Their return was short-lived. After Mary's death in November 1558, one of her successor's first acts was to annex the restored religious houses to the crown and reinstate a reformed religion. The community was once again escorted abroad, often moving from house to house and country to country. In 1594 they arrived in Lisbon, and there they remained for over 250 years. The Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829 having removed most of the restrictions imposed on Catholics, the community returned to England on 31 August 1861 and settled in Spetisbury, Dorset. Even in England their travels were not over; from Spetisbury they moved to Chudleigh in Devon, then to South Brent, where they first lived in a large house to accommodate their growing numbers, and finally to a smaller house, where they stayed until 7 September 2011, when the house was sold.[102] This, however, was not the end; the abbess, who had resumed her baptismal name, Sister Anne, reported that "According to Canon Law Syon Abbey has not been suppressed (as often happens on closure)." Some years before, the foresighted community had unanimously requested permission to move to Nazareth House when the situation required. In 2007, Rome granted permission, and the letter to Bishop Budd stated:

> The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, after careful consideration of the situation of the Bridgettine Sisters of South Brent and with the assurance of the Superior General of the Congregation of Nazareth Sisters to provide for the spiritual and

100 See, for example, Aungier, *The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery*, 88 n. 1.

101 See James P. Carley and Ann M. Hutchison, "1534–1550s: Culture and History," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, eds. Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie (Cambridge, U.K.: 2011), 225–48, at 236.

102 For a history of Syon Abbey, see, for example, E.A. Jones, *England's Last Medieval Monastery: Syon Abbey 1415–2015* (Leominster: 2015); John Rory Fletcher, *The Story of the English Bridgettines of Syon Abbey* (South Brent: 1933); Aungier, *The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery*.

> physical needs of the nuns, this Dicastery grants to your Excellency the faculty to relocate the Bridgettine Sisters to the area in the convent provided for them for the necessary period of time.

Thus in 2011 the three remaining sisters found their way to Plymouth, and in 2015, along with many others both religious and lay, they celebrated the 600th anniversary of Syon Abbey.[103] With more general participation in mind, Sister Anne supervised an English translation of the Birgittine Office.[104] Today, Sister Anne, the only remaining nun, recites the Office every day, and is often joined by others devoted to St Birgitta.

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103 See Ann M. Hutchison, "Syon Abbey Today," in *Syon Abbey Society Newsletter* 2 (2012), https://syonabbeysociety.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/sas_newsletter_issue_2.pdf [accessed 6 January 2019].

104 *Daily Office of Our Lady: The Syon Breviary*, trans. and set to music by Rev. Brian Foley, with a preface by Sister Anne Smyth, O.Ss.S. (Nazareth House, Plymouth: 2015).

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